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VOL I ISSUE 1

# Galaxy®

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## EDITORIAL

by E. J. GOLD

*Illustrated by Daumier*

Well, *Galaxy* is back. And just how, you may ask, are we able to start right off with a circulation of 10,000 -- that's a readership of about 30,000 -- ? Fair question, and it deserves an answer.

In a unique marketing strategy, we decided to combine our very popular and successful catalog with the magazine to synthesize what we call a *magalog* -- a literary magazine fleshed out with a direct home-marketing outlet.

We figured that a *magalog* would allow us to recover our operating expenses. Bringing *Galaxy* back from a dead start in this miserable economic and literary environment is going to be one whalloping task, but we've got an enthusiastic staff of artists and writers who are determined to make this dream a reality.

I suppose you're wondering where all that product information I just mentioned might have got to. Well, it was supposed to be at the back of the magazine portion. Fact is, there were just too many good stories, and, well, we're *artists and writers, for cryin' out loud!* We all felt that the magazine looked better with more art and stories. Yup, you guessed it. As the magazine portion grew, the catalog section shrank down to a tiny, tiny teensy-weensy single little ad. You're looking at it.

I made the decision, and I hope I'm right, that

you'd prefer to see the catalog separated from the literary issue. So, holding my breath until I turn blue, I'm waiting for the subscriptions to come rolling in, and with them, requests for the supporting catalog, the thing that makes it possible to actually *pay* the writers for all these great stories.

You should know that all subscriptions go into a special, protected fund. That's your money -- well, yours and the post office's. Most of our costs are relative to the postage and handling side of publishing.

You might want to know that we've been in the science-fiction publishing business for over a quarter of a century, and, through the catalog, we'd like you to know about those efforts, too. You might be pleased or dismayed to learn that, with your subscription, you automatically receive the catalog under separate cover.

Back when I went to school, we had what was called the honor system, and it worked. Everybody did their part. Well, we've done ours. We brought *Galaxy* back, as thousands of fans have asked us to do. Now it's your turn to do your part, by sending in your subscription today.

—E. J. GOLD





## THE CITY OF THE DEAD

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

*Photoillustrations by Gold*

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Bob Sheckley and E.J. Gold reconnected about two years ago, when Sirius Science Fiction — an imprint of Gateways Publishing — published an Artist's Edition of Bob's *Skulking Permit*, which E.J. had illustrated. Bob was enthusiastic about the project and felt that E.J.'s illustrations were very sensitive to the story. A few Months later, a newspaper called the *Evolutionary Rag* emerged from the ever-broadening publishing ventures of Gateways. Unbeknownst to all but a few, the *Evolutionary Rag* was a cloaking device for what was to become *Galaxy Magazine*, under E.J.'s editorship. At summer's end, Bob was sent a series of photographs by E.J. of BardoTown, a tabletop miniature city which he'd built over the past several years. These sparked a literary outburst in both of them, and Bob sent in the beginning part of *City of the Dead* within weeks. E.J. loved it and responded with more photos. This first installment is the beginning of a lifetime project between these two unbelievably creative individuals. May the sparks fly on both the dark and light sides of the Great Divide!

---

—MORGAN FOX

We fly through the streets of the city of the dead, a ghost among ghosts, and we turn the corners and respect the masses of the buildings, even though we could fly right through them. This is a documentary about hell, not a commentary. The city of the dead, the city of hell, is abstract enough without us worsening the situation by lying through walls that are supposed to be solid.

It is quite wonderful to be able to fly through the streets. Most of this city is built of a soft white marble, and it is a very classical sort of place. Plenty of pillars so that you could almost think you were in

Athens in about 400 B.C. But the streets are empty, there's no traffic of any sort, the city of the dead is a dead sort of place, although people have occasionally tried to start some entertainment.

It stands to reason, what else do the dead have to do but entertain themselves? What to do has been a problem for hell for a long time. What is death there for? What's it all about? This sort of thing begins to bother people once they find themselves dead. The first thing they do is check out their situation. OK, I'm dead, I've got that. So is this supposed to be punishment? If so, what for? Is it for my sins? Which

sins, specifically? Is atonement permitted? What do I have to do to atone? Or is it a question of serving a specific sentence? Or is this one forever, and should we just relax and take it one day at a time?

The main question of course is, how long does this go on? Most people would even take "Forever" as an answer. But that's not what they tell you, once you start asking. On the contrary. You are led to believe from the start that hell is for a period of time, after which there will be something else. Maybe this is the only way they can get you to think over your life. Because you're going to have to do something about it. Or so you think.

"By the way," I said, "would you like a pomegranate seed?"

I was Hades, a large well-built fellow with black hair and a black closely trimmed beard. I was a sort of piratical looking fellow, though soft in nature to belie my bold looks. My grabbing Persephone the way I did was the first thing of its kind I had ever done. Put it down to irresistible impulse. There she was, gathering flowers in the meadows with her girlfriends, and I was riding by in my golden chariot drawn by my four fiery black horses, and the next thing I knew she was in my arms and there was hell to pay.

Persephone of course was beautiful. She had long light brown hair that reached to her waist. Her nose, also, was quite finely drawn. It was one of those perfect Greek noses that merge up into the forehead.

That was then and now was now, six months later, and she and I were sitting in the little shaded platform on the banks of the Styx, at the place where Charon ties up his houseboat. She looked at the two pomegranate seeds I was holding out to her, and said, "You're not trying to trick me, are you?"

"No," I told her, "I'm not a tricky sort of a guy. I don't play games. That's not how we operate here in hell. We're direct, straightforward, just like I was when I kidnapped you in the first place. Do you remember that day?"

"I remember it all too well," Persephone said. "I was out in the fields, harvesting with my friends. You came riding up in your chariot of gold drawn by four fiery horses. You were wearing black."

"And I lifted you up with one arm, first twisting my cloak back so it would be out of the way. I put my arm around your waist and lifted you into my chariot."

"The girls just stood by and gaped," Perseph-

one said. "And when Mother found out, she didn't know what to make of it."

"She knew perfectly well what to make of it," I told her. "It had been prophesied long ago that this would happen: that I would see you gathering flowers with the other nymphs and fall in love with you. And it was the first time I ever fell in love. I'm not like the other gods, you know, Apollo and Poseidon and all that lot. They're forever falling in love and swearing that this time it's for keeps. And then they're off again next day after the next bit of skirt. But I am the King of Death and I only fall in love once."

"Poor Hades!" Persephone said. "Will you be very lonely without me?"

"I'll have my memories," I told her. "I've had a wonderful half year with you. I've loved having you on the throne beside me. I've been so happy that you're my queen in hell."

"I quite liked being queen of hell," Persephone said. "It's been special. I mean, hell is not like some other country. Hell is everything after it's been used up and turned all soft and easy to handle."

"Hell is the place of appreciation," I told her. "On



earth, when you're living, there's not enough time to really get into things. But here in hell everything can take as long as it needs. There's nothing to fear because we're dead already. But also there's nothing to feel bad about because in some weird way we're still living."

"The afternoons are so long," Persephone said. "They're like the afternoons when I was a girl. They seemed to just go on and on, and the sun is reluctant to climb down the sky. But here there is no sun. Just a faint sepulchral glow across the marshes that at irregular intervals lightens and darkens. But no definite sun. I miss the sun."

I nodded.

"We have light, but no sun. There's moonlight, though and the special light from the torches that light the halls of the palace of death."

"Yes, and they cast long shadows," Persephone said. "I used to be afraid of shadows, but in hell there isn't anything to fear."

"No," I said, "the worst has happened and it's all over. Won't you try this pomegranate seed?"

She took one of the pomegranate seeds I was offering her and put it on the palm of her narrow white hand. "Why do you want me to eat it?" she said. "It's a trick, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "I can keep no secrets from you. It's a trick."

"What happens if I eat it?"

"It means I will still have some claim on you even in the land of the living. It means that you will return to hell."

"Return to hell?" Persephone said. "But I was planning to return and visit you anyway."

I shook my head. "You don't know what you'll do when you get back into the upper world with its light and air. Once you're fully alive again, you'll forget

me. And you'll wonder how you ever came to enjoy this gloomy palace with its dark courtyards and the river of forgetfulness always running by with the dead souls swimming just below its surface and the weeping willows murmuring just overhead. You'll think to yourself, 'He must have bewitched me! No one in his right mind goes for a holiday in hell.'"

She smiled and touched my hand. "Maybe you have bewitched me. I'm quite content here in hell."

"Then eat the pomegranate seed," I told her.

She did not move. Her gaze was far away. She said after a while, "Achilles and Helen asked us over this evening for dinner. You must make my



apologies."

**We freeze on Hades and Persephone, and then we cut away from them, leave the river bank, track across green rolling meadows with topiary sculpture that makes the place look like a funeral home or a French park, and we continue to the palace of the dead.** From the middle distance it looks like a small city. The palace is the composite of many palace-shaped buildings. They are all crowded together, and some are a dozen levels high. You see all sorts of shapes in these buildings made up of many other buildings that make up the city of the dead. There are domes of all sorts, and spires, and many shapes, both curved and cubical. Binding them all together are narrow roadways from many different levels. From many of the buildings you can walk out a window on an upper floor and cross directly, or by a little catwalk, to the next building.

The lighting of the city of the dead is like moonlight. Or like late afternoon sunlight in winter as seen from behind a bank of clouds. It is not night, it is not day. Twilight is the eternal hour in the city of the dead.

There's not a lot to do around here. But if you're



bored, you can watch the people step out their windows and take to the catwalks to cross from one part of the city to another. There are wires that connect everything to everything else here, and some people use them as shortcuts, tiptoeing along the highwires to get from place to place. They do this clumsily, because few of the dead, just as few of the

living, have any acrobatic ability. They use the catwalks and highwires anyway, no one fears falling. When you fall from a catwalk in the city of the dead, you tumble down to the ground slowly, slowly, like a shadow falling. If you happen to bounce off a cornice or two,

or graze yourself on a gargoyle, or catch yourself on a sharp projecting bit of roof, it is no matter. You can't hurt yourself, you're already dead. You can't feel any pain. Pain is forbidden. That is because pleasure is forbidden. Or unlikely, almost the same thing.

Where there is no pleasure, there's no pain. Some might think that a good tradeoff. The dead in the palace of the dead don't think so. Being unable to hurt yourself just makes the boredom that much more excruciating. There are people in hell who cut their throats every evening. It doesn't do anything. It's just a gesture. But gestures are important when you don't have anything else, and all you have in hell are gestures. Some make gestures of pain, and cut their own throats. Others step out the windows and take to the catwalks and high wires and go visiting. Is visiting a pleasure? Not in hell. It is a gesture. The people of hell don't despise gestures. After you're dead, gesture is all that's left.

We zoom through a doorway, segue down a corridor, slither through a doorway, do the whole thing several times, and then we come to a stop in a large room. Achilles is sitting in a lyre-backed

chair. We know it is him because affixed to his back there is a bronze plaque reading AXHIAAEE.

The matter of easy identification has been found necessary in hell, where unnecessary confusion is frowned upon. It is more than enough work just to be dead, without wondering who the people all around you are. This plaque system is for the benefit, not just

of the inhabitants, but for future audiences which will look at the stories of people in this place on films made by us, the people who will either go back in time to record them, or build them up as imaginative constructs in the computer that can build anything that can be imagined. And looking just be-



yond that, we foresee a time when secondary and tertiary images will be capable of generation based not only on primary sources but also people's different versions of those primary sources; and while this might not strictly be the only kind of imagination—the jury's out on that one—it certainly is one of the possible sorts, a sort of synthesis manqué so the least we can do is keep everyone easily identifiable.

Back in the real world, of course, people are rarely found just sitting in a chair, not reading, not watching tv, not even thinking. But these are not realistic stories in that the sort of detail one would like—the incomes of the protagonists, their main loves and hates, their family tree for three generations, is unfortunately missing. But Achilles does in fact happen to be just sitting as we turn our attention to him. He spends a lot of time doing this. The problem of doing nothing is one of the greatest problems in hell, one which people have put a lot of attention into but not solved yet. Achilles certainly has not solved it. He is just sitting in his chair, staring into the middle distance.

Helen of Troy enters from the right.

It's a mistake to try to describe or even photograph the features of someone as famous, as numinous, as Helen of Troy, because her features exist mostly in dreams, where they are made up of the images generated by all the men who have ever dreamed of her, or at least a significant cross-section thereof, because the computer only needs a cross-section of data, not all of

it. Since we don't use the dreams of every one who ever dreamed of Helen, her reproduced image is a little blurred around the nose, though I think we captured her general shape quite nicely.

Suffice it to say, she's a good looking dame of everyone's predilec-

tion and she wears her bronze plaque with distinction, so you think, looking at her, she walks like she's Helen of Troy, and that of course is who she is. She wears a simple frock made up of silken ambiguities, and around her head is a golden lie.

"Hello, Achilles," she says. "I'm just back from the marketplace. Boy, have I got a story to tell you."

Achilles had been staring off into the middle distance, paying no attention to his wife, Helen of Troy. But on hearing her words, he turned his head.

"How could you hear anything? There's never any news around here. What could ever happen in hell? Just people's opinions, that's all you get in hell. So what could you have heard in the marketplace? I suppose the philosophers have figured out another proof for the possibility or the impossibility of this place existing? Frankly, I couldn't care less. It's a matter of minor importance, whether this place exists or not. But even if they have a proof about it one way or the other, it is still hardly news."

"Do stop making speeches," Helen said "It isn't your turn. Despite your hypothesizing, I do happen to have real and incontestable news of a timely and

late-breaking nature. That gives me the right, not only to speak, but also to embroider images and use words in strange and unlikely ways. For it is well known that matters must never be spoken of directly, and that one must not take refuge in the subterfuge which the Heisenbergian position forces on us."

"If you got some news," Achilles said brutally,

"what is it?"

"That approach is much too simple, my darling," Helen said. "Once the bearer of news has discharged her novelty, it is all over, she has no more news to impart, she is forced to return to her original rather static position, Unappreciated Love Object. Me. Can you fancy that?"



No, don't be too quick, my friend, I need to get some value out of the fact that I might even carry news, without being forced prematurely to divulge it."

"You run a fine line," Achilles said, "since what you mean is that you carry the imputation that you carry news, rather than the news itself. And an imputation is of much less value than the fact it imputes toward."

"What I have heard is weighty enough," Helen said, "for me to interrupt you and to tell you that what I have to tell is even now taking place, but out of your sight, my dear Achilles. Now, wouldn't you like to know what is happening?"

**The scene froze. The camera or whatever it was dissolved into a light show.** This was pleasurable in its own right, and mildly hypnotic as well. The dead have found that everything goes better when you're mildly hypnotized. In fact, there are some who say that death itself is but a state of mild hypnosis, or, to be more specific, that there is no such thing as death, since what we call death is merely a pathological hypnotic state from which we cannot waken.

Be that as it may, the camera was powered through a cable that trailed out through the window,

from which it hung in a great catenary loop so that, considering it as a roadway, we could travel along the curve, and see, at the top, a little house, under which the stream that is the cable flows. In the several rooms of this house above the torrent, there are various activities going on. We make a choice, go through the nearest door, and we see that we are in some sort of a control room.

There's a man sitting there. Hello, it's me! I look closer to see what I am doing.

I see that I am engaged in some extraordinary work involving symbols and dials and buttons. By manipulating the controls, I can put together all the inputs from all of the



selves who are signaling to me through the many threads that connect this place to everywhere else. It forms a beautiful tapestry. Or would if I could ever get it all together. Actually, I don't quite have it down yet. Or, even more likely, I have no idea what to do with it after I get it all together. Assuming I ever do.

I decide that I'll return to this place at some other time. There's a lot of stuff here that interests me. Not necessarily you, the audience for whom I'm spinning this tale. Why should you care what happens to me? But maybe you do, since this is likely your problem too, since everybody is everybody else. But it is time to return to Achilles and Helen.

"I'll hold it back no longer," Helen said. "For the sake of the story, I'll put aside the byways of statement and tell it to you forthright. The fact is, Achilles, someone is leaving Hell today."

Achilles was stunned, but not by Helen's statement. In fact he barely registered Helen's statement, astounding though it was. Another realization had come to him, and its even more monstrous implications had flooded his mind and was presently using up all referential emotion. The fact of

the matter was, Achilles suddenly saw that he was a provisional figure, and it really blew him out. Achilles had always considered himself immortal, without even thinking too much about it, and to realize now, on the basis of one tightly packed fragment of information that had come careening out of the god knows where and impacted in his mind, to realize that the collection

of circumstances that brought him to life today in the mind of the computer might not come to pass again soon, or perhaps even ever, well, it was really a little much.

Provisional!

It was an astounding thought, and Achilles forced himself to contemplate it without shrinking. Provisional

meant that he was a manipulable concept in someone else's mind, and it meant that he wasn't even important enough to that mind to ensure securing him for another appearance at a later date. Because the indications were clear, this entity who was doing this dreaming was about to shut down, go off line, take itself out of circuit, shift its attention-energy elsewhere, attend to something else. While that was going on, Achilles would be literally nowhere until he was brought back into this mind again. And when was that likely to happen? Perhaps never. Because Achilles realized (and it was a hell of a thing to become aware of) that he was as likely as not never to be thought of again, and certainly not in this context, unless he could do something, make some sort of impression on the entity dreaming him so that the entity, after taking care of his own unimaginable concerns, would call him up again rather than some other character. Some quick research convinced Achilles that this was the first time the computer had ever conjured him up, and the whole damned construct was likely to crumble into dream-dust unless the computer did the hard work necessary to give the damn thing some zing so that he

would call the city of the dead back into existence on subsequent occasions.

But how likely was that? Achilles ground his teeth in frustration. He was going to have to try to bribe the computer. What present could he make to bribe the Computer-dreamer who was the one who had synthesized all the available views of Achilles that Achilles was now cognating? How could he convince him, the errant and light-minded dreamer, that he, Achilles, was worth coming back for?

"I'll put it to you as directly as I can," Achilles said. "I'm trying out for Voice. I'm not asking for an exclusive. I want to be a

Viewpoint. And I know you're looking for one. I'm also trying to sell mood. I'm trying to talk you into making the City of the Dead a regular stop on your mental itinerary. I know you've been looking for a place like this."

The computer did not answer.

Theseus said in a soothing voice, "I know what you're scared of. That you'll make this commitment and then find out that this concept is not interesting. That it will not solve, all by itself, the problems of creativity and recombination and energy. That's it, isn't it? I hail your caution, applaud your uncertainty. That will make it all the stronger when you choose the right one, this one. Helen, why don't you say a few words?"

Helen smiled into the camera, and said, in low thrilling tones, "I think we can accommodate you very nicely. We're stage people, you see, Achilles and I, and we perform best when we're set into motion. We're not your tight-lipped modern people. If it's words you want, we have a lot of them for you. Daring words, lying words, but not boring words. Let us entertain you with the story of your life."

Achilles touched her shoulder. "Well said, Helen." And now he turns his face directly to us. We blink, unsure what to do, staring into the blinding beauty of Achilles' face. Because this Achilles is the Achilles of infinite thought over the possibility of great deeds in the world. Achilles also represents the hopelessness of falling in love with the wrong woman. Looking at him we realize, through a swift



glance at the sidebar, that Briseis, the love of his life, isn't even represented in this story, her whereabouts are unknown, and Achilles has been paired with Helen for purely symbolic reasons, two troupers acting out a part. "We've done what we could," Achilles said. "Now tell me what you learned in the marketplace."

"Hades, King of Hell, has gone out of the city and across the little streams that surround Hell. He has gone to the near shore of the Styx, where there is a meadow suitable for a picnic. But he does not picnic there, Hades, though he has caused a feast to be laid for his guest, Persephone."

"Persephone? Hades walks with Persephone, the Queen?"

"Of course. Who else would he walk with? You know how besotted he is of her."

"That's because she's living," Achilles said. "People are much more attractive when they're living. But she is a lovely woman in her own regard, and of course a first-class nature myth of considerable antiquity. Being a very old myth gives a girl a certain *panache*, don't you think?"

"Of course I do," Helen said. "You think being Helen of Troy is jello? Nobody knows about Persephone any more. But everybody knows Helen."

"I know you're wonderful," Achilles said soothingly, because he didn't want to get her started. He wanted to hear her news, wanted to know what was going on with Hades, however, because Hades'



condition was of importance to Achilles because he figured if he could put some pressure on Hades there might be a way to get out of this place. Because Achilles had by no means accustomed himself to being dead. At least not all of the time.

So if you are Achilles you attend to reality, even if reality is just being dead. But what you want is this

nice interior place protected from bill collectors, jealous lovers, bailiffs, lawyers, wives and ex-wives, husbands and children in all degrees of alienation, and all the rest of the people who live out there, just outside your head, in a world of their



own. They're a little much, aren't they, other people? That's why you like to come here, to the City of the Dead. That's why we're trying to convince you, or rather, demonstrate to you, that our City of the Dead is one hell of a good construct and is worthy of your most careful attention. We'll come back to this from time to time.

The important thing to remember is this: we are the party of freedom.

#### **We cut back to Hades. Me.**

Persephone was saying, "When Achilles hears about this, he'll go crazy. He wants like crazy to get out of hell."

"Achilles thinks he had a lot more fun when he was alive than was actually the case. He makes too much over living."

"Tell me the truth," Persephone asked me. "Is being alive really that good?"

I shrugged. "Achilles thinks so. But that's just one dead man's opinion."

Persephone and I were sitting together beside a black poplar and close to an enormous weeping willow, its branches trailing in the black waters of

Lethe which flowed silently past us with a slight gurgle, like a dead man's gasp. You could see low gray shapes across on the far shore but it was not possible to make out what they were. I was strangely happy. Being with Persephone always brought up that mood in me. They made hell seem brighter. Although gray clouds forever overhung this place, they seemed

majestical and inspiring today rather than ominous and sad. I was happy in hell. Which was lucky because I was king. Or, I should say I was almost happy and I was virtual king.

I looked at Persephone's hands. The one that held the pomegranate seed was on the other side, away from me. I couldn't see

if she had taken the seed or not. I supposed not. It seemed almost as if she had forgotten about it. But how could she have forgotten? The weight of all that stagecraft pressed on my soul. I knew something was about to happen.

Then, very faintly from the direction of the palace, I heard a jingling sound. Persephone heard it too. She said, "That's the little bells on Demeter's harness. It's the harness she put on the bullocks that draw her cart. She is coming for me, as we agreed."

"Yes," I said. For I had been forced to agree to Persephone's returning to the upper world. The weird old ladies who make up what you could call the Supreme Court of Hell had handed down a restraining order on me. Cease and desist. Give the wench up. I had briefly contemplated revolt. But then wised up. I didn't stand a chance against the living. Not even if all the dead fought for me, which was far from sure. Trouble is, the dead don't fight worth shit. Dying seems to take something out of a man. It would be slaughter. There's nothing the living like better than killing the dead. They consider us evil. A case of projection if I ever saw one. But impossible to fight



against.

And anyhow, I was in the wrong, snatching her off the face of the earth like I'd done was against the rule. I was in the wrong. And being in the wrong weakened my case.

The way it was originally set up, when Zeus, Poseidon and I divided all creation between us after

we succeeded in killing old Cronus, our rules were very simple and clear. Each to be supreme lord of his own realm, and no poaching on the terrain of any of the others. These rules were not always followed in full. But potentially, if anyone had a complaint, this was the rule

they referred back to. I knew that but I took her anyhow. I took her because I wanted her. But my desire had no standing in the law. And even though Persephone was the most important thing in my life, such as it was, because I think you understand now that the life even of a king of hell is not to be compared to that of the most miserable living human being, or so the philosophers say, I was bound by the rule of law concerning cosmic property and all that relates to it, unfair and arbitrary though that rule might be. But you simply must have the rule. Your life is nothing without rules, and even death is anything much without its rules.

"The seed," I said. "What about the seed?"

She opened both her hands. They were empty. "Oh," she said. "I must have dropped it." And yet there was a lightness in her voice. Nothing very playful ever happens in hell so I didn't really know how to react to it.

"Don't tease me," I said. "Do you have the seed? Or did you drop it? Or did you conceal it and plan to take it later?"

She bent forward and kissed me on the forehead.

"Of course I'm going to tease you. Teasing, my love, is exactly what you need. You're all too gloomy and serious here."

"You've changed all that," I told her. "You've brought a lightness and a pleasure to hell that I never thought possible. Won't you leave me now with some hope that you'll return?"



"Oh, you'll always have that hope," she said, "no matter what I do or say. It's certainty that you really want, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," I said. "Can't I have that? The certainty of your return for six months of every year?"

She shook her head but she was smiling. "Certainty is a very

salient quality of your realm.

"Everybody knows exactly where they stand, which is nowhere. There seems to be nothing quite as certain as death. I think that's what Achilles really objects to about being here.

"That's what you dead people have grown very accustomed to. 'Maybe death is bad,' you say to yourself, but at least it's reliable, at least I can count on it."

"Sure we say that," I said.

"That's because you're dead," Persephone pointed out. "But I'm not, I'm alive. I'm not bound by your rules. I'm a creature of the realm of life. Where I come from, we have no certainty. Everything changes from better to worse, from worse to better. There's always hope and there's always despair."

The sound of the bullock's bells grew louder. And then the wagon itself came into sight, decked in flowers, drawn by six garlanded heifers. Demeter herself was standing in the front looking stern and classical, her usual look. She had a little whip in her hand made of grapevine. Her hair was blowing free and she brandished her whip in the air in salutation

when she saw Persephone.

Demeter is one of those people who are important but you don't want to deal with them. They're so significant that you don't want to shortchange them, but they don't play any part in your story so how much characterization do you need? Does a personification of Autumn need a mole on her chin? *Must* we give her a dumpy figure, and flinty, unrelenting eyes? Yes, the eyes, maybe. But not the rest. She rides in standing up in a bullock cart. You know what kind of woman would do that. Need we say more?

Persephone rose, then she bent over and kissed me once, lightly, on the lips. Before I could put my arms around her, she had drawn away. She stepped up lightly into Demeter's cart. And soon they were gone.

Hades stood there with a stupid look on his face. She was gone. And he had no one to talk to. It looked like he was going to have to monologue.

Suddenly she was back with her cart and her disapproving mother and her garlanded bullocks. The whole shot. The eternal recurrence! Hades' heart leaped.

"I forgot to remind you about Achilles and Helen," she said. "You'll have to cancel our dinner with them."

"You did remind me," I said.

"I did?" Persephone said.

"You did," I said.

"Previously. But I'm glad you came back. There was something I was going to ask you."

"I thought you'd never get around to asking me anything," Persephone said. "I know you love me, but you're entirely too silent and gloomy about it. At least you could talk about it a little. Yes, I'll be pleased to

answer. What do you want to ask?"

"What I want to ask," I said, "is that I heard that you know what is happening to Tantalus these days, and I wanted you to tell me."

"I'll be happy to," Persephone said. "I'll be as quick as possible, mother," she called out to the old woman in the shawl driving the bullocks, her mother, Demeter. Her mother nodded resignedly. It was enough she was getting her daughter back. No sense of-fending her by interrupting her story.

Persephone said, "I've always found Uncle Tantalus an interesting figure. You know his general circumstances, I assume." Waist-

deep in mud in a swamp. Huge rock suspended above him on a thin copper wire. The rock never drops, of course, but the suspense is nevertheless intense, because it was written in by Zeus himself that no one should take anything for granted concerning the boulder, it could drop at any time, there was no story device forestalling it, even though we always pick it up at a moment when the boulder is just hanging there solid as a rock. There is no way around such a situation except by arbitrary rule: You will feel anxiety for Tantalus on account of the boulder over his head. Do that or we'll strike the Greek Myth set.

Tantalus is standing there in a muddy little pool on the banks of the Styx up to his chin in water. But each time he bends over to take a drink, the water recedes from him, leaving his face caked with black mud and him with the nickname given him by the Corybantes, Old Dirty-mouth. No water for Tantalus. That's the first rule.

Next, from branches of the willow tree near which he is chained, from drooping branches hang great snack foods, whole pastramis, liverwursts, salamis of every size, sort and description, cheeses like the world



has never seen, composed salads, beautifully cooked vegetables suspended in cobwebs, themselves edible.

But of course, you guessed it, when Tantalus tries to eat anything, the thing is pulled out of his hands and is always just out of his reach. So he's standing there up to the chin in water he can't drink surrounded by foods he can't eat and this is Zeus's idea of a really cruel punishment.

But in hell you get used to anything and if Tantalus couldn't drink the water, at least he could feel it, the feel of water lapping around his legs. They hadn't taken that away. Couldn't. What would be left if he couldn't feel the water he stood in?

The water was really feeling good

this morning. Sometimes that happens even in hell. They try to gross you out, but sometimes they slip up. This was Tantalus at his best, trying to make the best of his lot. Inviting friends over for a banquet even if he couldn't eat it himself.

His guests came from far and wide. From all parts of hell. Soon they were all assembled. And then Tantalus addressed them.

"My friends," he said, "you will forgive me if I don't get out of the water just now. It's my whim to entertain you while standing chin-deep in this rather delicious flow."

The fact was, Tantalus had been in hell so long that he had been granted certain privileges. Like the right of bathing in any river of hell of his choosing. This morning it was the Lethe. Of all the rivers of Hell, this was his favorite. The gods had dug mud pits on the banks of all the rivers of hell, and planted willow trees there to carry the food, and Tantalus could stand in any mud-pit he wanted just as long as he gave the people who arrange this sort of thing a little advance notice so they could set everything up.

It had taken Tantalus quite a long time to talk

Hades and the other gods into giving him free access to the rivers. "After all," he had pointed out, "I'm not trying to mitigate my sentence. It has been clearly pointed out that I am indeed doomed to stand until eternity with water up to my chin, and that's all very well, I accept that. But why shouldn't I have different waters and different views?"

At first nobody paid any attention to him. Then his case was finally heard by the Judges.

Rhadamanthus, chief god of the judges of the dead, had at first refused to listen to Tantalus' argument. "It's not traditional," he grumbled.

"No," Tantalus replied, "but there's no rule against it. What



isn't forbidden is allowed."

Rhadamanthus, Minos and the other judge hadn't been interested in getting into it, certainly not at first. It looked like a lot of trouble and they had plenty of work on their hands. There was a lot to do back in those days. People were always dying and coming through from Earth, arriving at the great crossroads where the judges of the dead sat, showing up in droves, hundreds, thousands, and then millions. There was scarcely time to judge the tenth part of them. Their stories were in many ways remarkably similar.

Most of the souls waiting to be judged were clad in winding-sheets. Some still had their jaws bound with the graveyard bandages. A few had managed to bring money with them, and some of them had quite a lot of money, because although Charon demanded but a single obol, several of the more aristocratic families had stuffed several obols, or a shekel or two, or even an entire talent of silver into their mouths. It was better than looking cheap.

It is well-known that Charon, the boatman of the dead, demanded payment for ferrying dead souls to Hades—one obol, cash on the barrelhead. Since there

are no pockets in shrouds, the dead used to carry their money down to hell in their mouths.

The reason for payment to Charon, and the whole subject of money in hell, forms an interesting and permissible side issue. There is no use for money in hell. You only need money for buying and selling, and earth's the place for that, not hell. Nothing's for sale in

hell, and people down there get into a terrible mental condition due to atrophy of the buying gland. They say that no matter how long he lives in hell, a mortal never gets over the memory of the convenience stores of earth. There are none in hell, nor are there inconvenience stores,

though it's an interesting idea. So, nothing to buy, but form was important.

Nevertheless, he refused to take people aboard except for money. The moneyless dead used to gather on the Styx's near shore and complain. It is a terrible thing, having to listen to the dead whine. They would stand or lie in the mud of the riverbank and cry to Charon, asking to be taken across anyhow, for free, consider it a public service. Charon would just glare at them and say, "No free rides, not even in hell!"

It became a scandal, the way the penniless dead were piling up on the earthside shore.

Charon was a stickler for form. He charged for the sake of form, not for the money. He had no use for people's obols. He had a great stack of them that he kept in his locker back in Styxville, in the boathouse where he brought his houseboat in for repairs from time to time and as occasion demanded. For there are dangers even to crossing the Styx and if you think dead is the last word dangerwise, that just shows you haven't seen what can go wrong after you're dead.

The famous people among the dead had no trouble getting across, whether they had money or not. No one

was going to stop a famous courtesan like Lais of Corinth, or Sappho, who was said to be able to discourse more cleverly than Socrates. By the time Rome became a power, the custom of putting an obol in the mouth of the dead had fallen into abeyance, not least for the lack of obols that a bankrupt and discredited Greece no longer sent forth into the world.

But the old obol - in - the - mouth construct still remained. But it didn't matter, no one was going to keep a Roman empress out of hell just because her tiny white teeth were not clenched over a copper coin.

It had taken Tantalus a while to get used to visits from Roman Emperors who hadn't even

been gleams in their daddy's eyes back in his day. They came to visit him because he was one of the sights, and they asked him questions all respectful-like because Tantalus was one of the old ones, one of the first settlers, one of the original population of Hell, The First Damned, they called themselves, the world's first criminals.

Tantalus had seen a lot of changes going on over the years that he had been here. What the hell, he used to tell the new recruits who came to him for advice, it isn't so bad a place. You can get used to anything. Even hell. Maybe even especially hell. Because when the worst has befallen you, there really is nothing else to fear.

The camera swung into action again, forefront of the shockwave of recognition, speeding down long dusty corridors with the reflected light gleaming off them, and, in its ingratiating manner, stopped to point out that Tantalus had some old friends down here. Take Sisyphus, for example, and we cut to a big bald old guy with a beard, condemned to carry a boulder up the side of a steep mountain, then, when he reached the top, roll it back to the bottom again.





That was all right as far as it went. Trouble is, no one said how long he should keep on doing it. Sisyphus continued to roll his boulders down the mountainside long after his punishment ought to have been over, long past the time when he should have been released in his own recognizance.

But no, they kept Sisyphus working. Sisyphus got a lot of wear but he didn't wear out because human spirit is eternal and a good thing too, it needs all the longevity it can get. Sisyphus used to go through a lot of boulders.

Letting boulders fall back down the mountain was part of his job, so he can't be accused of wanton destruction. It's just

that no one had thought through the ecological consequences. Because when he was on the mountaintop he would release the stone and it would roll down the mountain, what could be simpler. But they kept on having to bring him fresh boulders, and they finally even had to change his mountain, because he simply wore it away with his boulder-rolling. Sisyphus' boulders cut deeper and deeper paths into the mountainside, wearing a scalloped path and finally wearing it all away. So the people in charge of that sort of thing had to go all over trying to find suitable boulders for him to carry up. The boulder couldn't be just any slab or rock; it had to be quite round otherwise it wouldn't roll all the way back down to the bottom, except that sometimes it broke into pieces before it got there. And that also took its toll.

The camera swings into view again and considers for our delectation the mechanism of temptation. We dolly back to: **Tantalus in the nicest way we know how.**

We get serious for a moment. We know—what need to tell us again?—that the earthly vision consisted of fruits and roasted meats and other good things dangled from the branches of trees above

Tantalus' head — tantalizingly — which they jerked back out of his reach when he reached for them. So of course after a while he didn't reach for them any more. But no one thought about that.

In any event, all that food had to be renewed almost daily, just the same as if he had made a meal of it. Because you can't tempt a man with a moldy roast

and a bunch of rotten grapes. So you could say that in order for there to be a punishment, Tantalus, though he never tasted a morsel, still went through a hell of a lot of food.

And as times changed, and new certainties came and went, the style of his meals changed, also.

In the beginning they tempted

him with simple fare: oat cakes, radishes and onions, and an occasional bit of roasted lamb. When a new administration came in, some thinking was done about all this.

"This classical hell of ours," one of the chief administrators pointed out at a recent meeting, "is an important interstellar tourist attraction. Millions of people come here nightly in their dreams. Millions more are brought here in one way or another. Even alien peoples come to visit us. We are an important exhibition, I could almost say a diorama of man's spirit. And it is necessary for us to put on a good show."

This became law and there was a great hustle and bustle in the halls of the administration of ancient halls and monuments. Everything had to be refurbished. In Tantalus' case, the whole exhibit was to be spruced up and this meant new menus. Cooks were trained to prepare the newer more modern meals that the menus called for, volunteers were not in sufficient supply so some people who were not actually cooks by any stretch of the imagination were especially condemned to do this work. But after a





while the job acquired some *panache* and the finest chefs in the world vied to cook for Tantalus.

Tantalus found hanging from the branches of his tree items that he had never dreamed of before. In fact, special guides had to be assigned to explain to him what the offerings were, otherwise he wouldn't know what he was missing and his punishment would lose both efficacy and symbolic value. So they told him, "This is smoked boar in aspic, and this is *pears-bel-Helene*, and this is a compote of rare fruits." And so on and so on. And they waited anxiously to see how he responded to all this, and took notes, because Tantalus, after all, was the standard by which temptation was judged.

Tantalus quickly got into the spirit of connoisseurship that his work required. He knew he was an important cultural artifact. It was not small potatoes to realize that all temptation was to be judged by the effect it had on him. He was like the Smirnov Man of the ancient world. He grew captious and difficult to please. With the succession of feasts that were put in front of him day after day, he became very knowledgeable in the preparation of foods. He didn't have to taste to know good from bad. He would complain bitterly when he detected by some means known only to himself that a spice was missing. "This turbot is entirely too peppery. This lamb, too bland by half, and adorned with the wrong kind of honey. This sauce, it has a bitter taste underneath it."

The cooks used to grow very angry at Tantalus. How, they asked, could he judge the food without tasting it? For of course the hellish mechanism made sure he never tasted anything. And Tantalus told them he did it first of all by the aroma, which he made sure to sniff, and secondly by the sheer powers of

discrimination which had developed in his mind. "For look you, gentlemen, actually tasting these foods dulls the senses. I wouldn't taste your food if I were able to! But what I'm here for is to judge it, and I have to tell you that this meal is just not up to snuff."

And that was the end of Persephone's reply to Hades, and she got back into the bullock wagon and

let Demeter carry her back to the upper world. No eyewitnesses exist who can tell us what happened to the pomegranate seed she had had in her hand. But it is a fact that she returned to Hell and to her spouse, Hades, every fall, just as the world was turning dark and cold. Winter with tiny snow flakes came and went and soon the



hounds of spring appeared in the upper valleys. I sat on my throne in hell and had dinners with Achilles and Helen and waited for Persephone to return. What was she doing, I wondered. What about that pomegranate seed? And just before she came back, at the very last possible instant, when I had used up all my hope and I had grown tired of thinking about the inhabitants of hell, I thought to myself, what I want is my Persephone. It's the beginning of winter now, and as I sit there on my iron throne, the taste of ashes in my mouth, I hear the faint sound of bells. And I know it heralds a blessed event, the arrival of my beloved, though you can never be sure.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

*Continued Next Issue*



## THAT'S THE SPIRIT

by HORACE L. GOLD

*Illustrated by Goya*

**S**tanding just inside the Pen & Ink Room of the Domestic Press Club, I looked from table to table until I found the man I'd come to see — old Warren Whitman, dean of the loyal opposition to whatever party was in power, the news analyst's news analyst.

White head down, he was staring at the glass in his hand as if it were a crystal ball; and his was a corner table, away from all the others. He used to preside over the big table, not laughing very much but, clearly enjoying his deanhood, and now he sat alone, unseeing, unhearing, and very probably uncaring. It worried and upset the other newspapermen, who made me their representative to find out what was wrong, not because Whitman and I had ever been any sort of friends, but solely because I ran a medical column in

the local tabloid.

"Mind if I join you?" I asked twice, without getting a reply. Finally I shook his shoulder till he looked up, then pointed at the chair and myself.

"By all means!" he exclaimed and stood up, his manners coming back in a rush. He reached up to his left ear and did something to it, then sat down when I did. "Let me think," he said and was silent for a minute or two. "Of course — you're Dr. Hutton of the *Morning Mouth*." He gave a poor little chuckle. "That's what we on the other newspapers call it," he explained.

I rewarded him with a contents-noted nod, unable to work up even a slight smile after hearing it for nearly five years.

Whitman leaned back and studied me. "You can't

be coming to me as a fellow journalist for we have nothing reportorially in common. So you must be here as a physician. Correct?" I said yes and he put out his left hand, palm up, saying, "Pulse, 79 — same as my age — blood pressure, 132 over 80. Anything else?"

"That's a bad tick you've developed," I said.

He reached up to his left ear. "No more tick?" he said almost jovially.

"No more tick," I admitted.

"I keep my hearing aid in off position as much as possible," he said, turning it back on. "So would you, if you were I."

"So would I?" I said. "Why?"

His gaze wandered from mine, then back, with a visible effort. "Because I, Warren Whitman, dean of commentators, hear voices. No, one voice."

"And the hearing aid helps you hear it?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! But I'm being inexcusably rude. Joel!" he called out to the waiter. Joe came over to our table. "What will you have, Doctor?" "The usual, Joe," I said, and waited for Whitman to give his order, because he was noted for never taking a hard drink.

"I'll have a wet Martini," he said at last. "You know, half gin, half vermouth — *sweet vermouth*." Joe's trained face showed no expression, but mine must have, for Whitman explained to me — he was *always* explaining — "The formula of the original Martini, doctor, not the mouth-puckering, ulcer-provoking modern version."

He was about to go on with the Martini's history, but I cut him short with, "To get back to the voice and the hearing aid —" and I gestured at his ear and spread my hand out. He removed the instrument and put it in my palm. I made as if to insert it in my ear and mouthed, "O.K.?"

"O.K.," he said, sliding forward eagerly. Please do!

So I did, and we held our breaths for a long moment. "Maybe it's the wrong ear," I said, shifting it to the other one. I took it out, finally, and put it in his hand. "Not a thing," I said.

"I don't understand," he said, disappointed. As soon as he had the hearing aid inserted, his face, hands and body clenched. "Why didn't you talk while *he* wore it?" he demanded angrily of the air. He listened, then turned toward me. "Would you care to know his answer?"

I nodded.

"He states, 'I was assigned to you, not to this other

guy.'"

I sat in silence, wondering what to say or do. It isn't very often that I wish I had a practice, having gone straight from interning to my medical column, but this was one of those times. A good, solid bedside manner was needed and I never had to develop one.

"Have you checked out the hearing aid?" I asked. "It might be picking up a ham radio station."

"Of course I had it checked. It is picking up something far more upsetting than a mere mundane ham operator."

"Such as?"

He leaned over his arms. "Before I tell you that," he said, "I want to know what *you* think I've stood for in the half-century that I have been doing what I call my job."

"Suppose you tell me?" I evaded, using the psychiatrist's device of turning questions back on the patient.

"All right, I shall tell you," he said. His famous index finger speared me as it had impaled tens of thousands of lecture-goers; he used to be very big on the circuit, till age slowed him down. "I, sir, am a fighting liberal. Not a so-called quote liberal unquote. I've fought every attack on the Constitution of the United States from whatever side it emanated, Left as well as Right. I've given my long life to defending the Republic when it was correct, and chiding it when it was wrong, and my chiding, sir, was usually effective. As a fighting liberal, I am neither party's captive. Furthermore —"

"I know, I know," I said. "I read your column regularly."

He took his arms off the table and sank back into himself. I felt guilty for stopping him, but I really did know what he stood for, just as every one of his millions of readers did. Besides, he was getting away from the subject.

"More upsetting than a ham operator," I repeated. "Such as?"

"Such as — such as abolishing labor unions and outlawing strikes! I, a founding father of the Newspaper Guild, am being told that by a nitwit whatever-it-is out of thin air!"

"Couldn't it be your subconscious?" I asked.

"My subconscious be damned!" he cried. "I've been to every sort of mental specialist there is, and not one of them could explain why I hear this imbecilic voice when my instrument is on, and not when it is

off. Can you account for it?"

"Not if they couldn't," I said, loyal as always to the profession.

"Very well," he said belligerently. "I am also being told to impeach the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court! Moreover, I — Warren Whitman — am being told to break the nuclear test-ban treaty, abolish Social Security, repeal Medicare —"

"Mr. Whitman!" I said, alarmed. "You must get a grip on yourself!"

"Yes, yes, I suppose I must," he said, subsiding. "But there is much more —"

"First a little rest," I ordered, "without talking, and a drink."

He focused with some difficulty on the untouched glasses that Joe had brought us somewhere along the line.

I waited till the old crusader had taken a hefty swallow, matched by one of my own, then said: "Repeal Medicare, you were saying."

"And repeal the Sixteenth Amendment — that's the income tax — and stop all immigration, turn over the TVA to private enterprise, and, of course, invade Bosnia-Herzegovina, Haiti and Cuba."

"Is that it?" I asked. "The whole thing?"

He waved his age-spotted hand wearily. "You know the rest. Repeal fair employment, destroy China before she gets too powerful, and the rallying cry, 'Better Dead Than Red!' Do I have to list them all?"

"No, no," I said hastily. "I get the picture."

In a way, it was funny, the dean of commentators being fed this line of politics, whether by his hearing aid, as he contended, or his subconscious, as I believed — and was sure the experts shared my conviction. People, including deans of commentators, don't go around hearing voices that aren't there unless they're sick in the head.

Everybody contains contradictions of all sorts, political or anything else.

While I had been thinking all that, he had been moodily putting away his wet Martini. Now he roused himself and said, "Do you know why I have to wear a hearing aid despite the fact that my hearing is normal?"

"No, I don't," I said, humoring him.

"Because, Dr. Hutton, he wanted me to get a hearing aid that he could tune in on — so he filled my ears with *ectoplasm*!"

I jumped to my feet. "Now that's too much!"

He pushed back his chair and stood up. "And do you want to know who's haunting me? I'll tell you — it's Harold M.N. Jones!"

"Gotcha!" I exclaimed. "Harold M.N. Jones isn't dead! He's in a coma, but he's still alive!"

"That's right," said Whitman, sitting down slowly, carefully. "He has been in a coma since May nineteenth. I had to buy my hearing aid two days later. And he has been getting stronger every day."

"Weaker, you mean."

"No, stronger. I can almost hear him now without my aid. Doesn't that make sense, if you have been forced to believe in ESP — and ghosts?"

"Not to me, it doesn't," I said nastily, sitting down again. It took a long moment to start feeling ashamed of myself for getting angry. Good thing, I thought, me not having a practice. I'd probably go around kicking babies.

"A conservative ghost," I said, going along with the gag. "Aren't there any so-called quote liberal unquote ghosts?"

"Certainly there are," he said. "But, according to Jones, they congregate exclusively in Washington, D.C., the U.N. and other such places, whereas the conservative ghosts, he told me, work at the precinct level. Very effectively, too, you must agree — the conservative vote is growing all the time."

He signaled to Joe, who brought us refills. Whitman finished his drink in two swallows, picked up the check and headed for the cashier. "You leave the tip," he said over his shoulder. "Then come along with me."

Outside, Whitman steered me toward his newspaper's building. I tried to make conversation, but he pulled his hearing aid out of a pocket and showed it to me. "Two reasons for not wearing it," he said. "One, I need all my breath for walking. Two, I don't want to listen to Jones — he is stronger than ever."

We took the elevator to the editorial offices, where he stopped to look at Harold M.N. Jones's obit, which was ready to go to press as soon as he died. Whitman seemed to get great pleasure out of reading it. Then we went to the wire room and watched the teletype machines drum out the latest news from all over.

There was a sudden scream from behind me. I whipped around. Whitman was stamping on his hearing aid and shrieking: "He's dead! Jones is dead!"



Without thinking, I checked my watch. It was 6:25 P.M. I don't know why doctors note moments of birth and death, but they do. So did I. Then I tried to see what I could do for Whitman. He was sitting crosslegged on the floor, punching his temples with both fists. A crowd of employees had heard his scream and come running. I wished I had a black bag and a prescription pad, neither of which I had ever needed before.

"I hear him! I hear him!" Whitman was yelling. "He's inside my head!"

"Somebody get the doctor," an authoritative voice said. "You, Gross — fast!"

I let Whitman's friends and fellow employees take over and found myself waiting for the end of the Jones story on the teletype. Just as I was feeling like an idiot for acting as if I believed Whitman's fairy tale, the item clattered in. All I wanted to know was the time of death. There it was — 4:21. I pitied Whitman, but I couldn't help feeling a little triumphant; he was over two hours wrong.

He was shouting, "The ex-President is *not* a Communist agent and fluoridation is *not* a Communist conspiracy!" when the doctor arrived and gave him a stiff needle.

"You must relax," the doctor said emphatically. "It's not good for a man your age to get so excited."

I restrained the urge to say, "He can't hear you — his ears are filled with ectoplasm!"

But Whitman did calm down. Tie and belt loosened, collar opened, he was a sight, sitting on the floor, surrounded by worried people. I didn't have to

take it. I went outside.

I was lighting a cigarette when I noticed a clock on the wall and checked my watch. It was four minutes fast. So Whitman had gotten the minute exactly right. Coincidence, of course. Now what about the two-hour difference?

Bothered, but not very, I went back to the wire room and hunted till I found the item on Harold M.N. Jones. There was the moment of death, 4:21. And there were the three letters I had subliminally noted: CST — Central Standard Time — and we were on Eastern Daylight Time, two hours later.

Big deal, I told myself. If I had stayed on top of the Jones story as hard as Whitman had, I could have gotten the time of death just as right.

Two men in white, carrying a stretcher, came into the wire room. They got Whitman onto the stretcher, but he told them to stop while he looked for someone.

It turned out to be me.

"Dr. Hutton," he whispered in a drugged but forceful way, pulling me down so my ear was next to his mouth, "you are the only person I have told about my being haunted — and, with any sort of luck, the last. I am going to my home in the country, where nobody can hear me say, 'Abolish the United Nations!'" His voice rose shrilly. "I solemnly declare that I shall never write another line!"

And he never did. Frankly that was just fine by me. I'd had enough of him and his so-called "liberal" ideas.

— HORACE L. GOLD

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## THE NATURE OF THE PLACE

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

*Illustrated by Pynson*

At the age of twenty, Paul Dearborn first reached the conviction that he would ultimately go to hell. He worried over it, but not for very long.

At the age of forty, the idea of going to hell positively appealed to him. Heaven would be so dull, after all.

But by the time he was sixty, he was just a bit uneasy again. "It's not that I'm afraid of it," he said one night after two beers too many. The shabby little man standing next to him at the bar only smiled. "I'm not afraid at all," Paul repeated firmly. "Just—uneasy."

"How can you be so sure you're going there?" the little man wanted to know.

"Oh, I've never doubted it," Paul said. "And I don't feel bitter, mind you. I've had a rather pleasant

life," he said untruthfully, "and I'm prepared to pay the price. I've got no complaint coming. Another beer?"

"Don't mind if I do," the little man said.

Paul signaled the bartender for refills. "I know where I'm heading, all right," he went on. "But the damned *uncertainty* bothers me. If I only knew what the place was like—"

The little man's eyes gleamed. "Faith, man, it's hot and smelling of brimstone there, and the sinners are roasting in the lake of fire, and right in the heart of it all is the old devil himself, up on his throne with his horns sharp as swords, and his tail going *slick-slick* like a cat's."

Paul chuckled patronizingly. "Oh, no, I can't buy that. Straight out of 1910 Sunday School lessons. Hellfire and brimstone just won't convince me."

The other shrugged. "Well, if you want to be an individual—"

"That's just it," Paul said, smacking the palm of his hand against the counter. "Hell's such an *individual* thing."

His companion lapsed into silence, contemplating with bleary eyes the suds at the bottom of his beer glass. Paul had another round, then looked at his watch, decided it was about time to leave for home. He dropped a bill on the counter and sauntered out. *I'll get what I deserve*, he told himself firmly.

He walked toward the bus stop. It was a chilly night, the wind cutting into his bones. He was tired. He lived alone, now; his most recent wife was dead, his children strangers to him. He had few friends. Many enemies.

As he rounded the corner, he paused, wheezing. *My heart. Not much time left now.*

He thought back over his sixty years. The betrayals, the disappointments, the sins, the hangovers. He had some money now, and by some standards he was a successful man. But life hadn't been any joyride. It had been rocky and fear-torn, filled with doubts and headaches, moments of complete despair, others of frustrated rage. He realized he was more than half glad he was almost at the end of his road. Life, he saw now, had really been

a struggle not worth the bother. Sixty years of torture. There was the bus, half a block ahead, and he was going to miss it and have to stand in the cold for twenty minutes. Not very serious? Yes, but multiply it by a million slights and injuries over the years—scowling, he began to run toward the corner.

And stumbled as a cold hand squeezed tight around his heart. The sidewalk sprang up to meet him, and he knew this was death. For a startled instant he fought for control, and then he relaxed as the blackness swept down. He felt gratitude that it was over at long last—and a twinge of curiosity about what was to come.

After an age, he opened his eyes again and looked around. And, in that brief flashing moment before Lethe dimmed his eyes, he knew where Hell was, knew the nature of the place and to what eternal punishment he had been condemned. Paul Dearborn wailed, more in despair than in pain, as the doctor's hand firmly slapped his rear and breath roared into his lungs.

—ROBERT SILVERBERG

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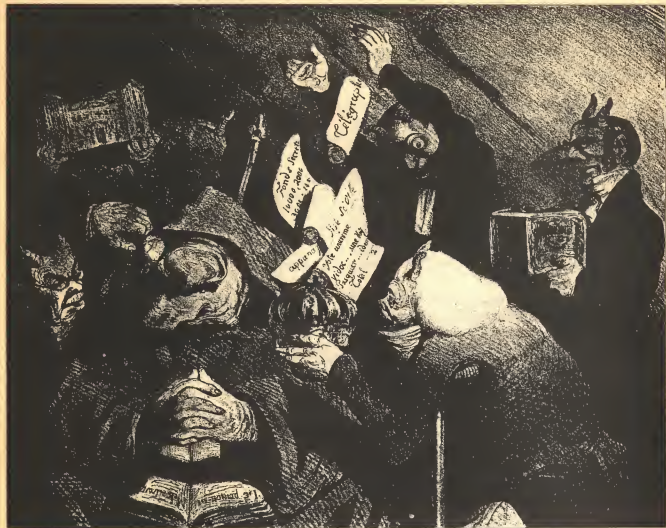
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## PYTHIAS

by FREDERIK POHL

*Illustrated by Daumier*

I am sitting on the edge of what passes for a bed. It is made of loosely woven strips of steel, and there is no mattress, only an extra blanket of thin olive-drab. It isn't comfortable; but of course they expect to make me still more uncomfortable.

They expect to take me out of this precinct jail to the District prison and eventually to the death house.

Sure there will be a trial first, but that is only a formality. Not only did they catch me with the smoking gun in my hand and Connaught bubbling to death through the hole in his throat, but I admitted it.

I — knowing what I was doing, with, as they say, malice aforethought — deliberately shot to death Laurence Connaught.

They execute murderers. So they mean to execute me.

Especially because Laurence Connaught had saved my life.

Well, there are extenuating circumstances. I do not think they would convince a jury.

Connaught and I were close friends for years. We lost touch during the war. We met again in Washington, a few years after the war was over. We had, to some extent, grown apart; he had become a man with a mission. He was working very hard on something and he did not choose to discuss his work and there was nothing else in his life on which to form a basis for communication. And — well, I had my

own life, too. It wasn't scientific research in my case — I flunked out of med school, while he went on. I'm not ashamed of it; it is nothing to be ashamed of. I simply was not able to cope with the messy business of carving corpses. I didn't like it, I didn't want to do it, and when I was forced to do it, I did it badly. So — I left.

Thus I have no string of degrees, but you don't need them in order to be a Senate guard.

Does that sound like a terribly impressive career to you? Of course not; but I liked it. The Senators are relaxed and friendly when the guards are around, and you learn wonderful things about what goes on behind the scenes of government. And a Senate guard is in a position to do favors — for newspapermen, who find a lead to a story useful; for government officials, who sometimes base a whole campaign on one careless, repeated remark; and for just about anyone who would like to be in the visitors' gallery during a hot debate.

Larry Connaught, for instance. I ran into him on the street one day, and we chatted for a moment, and he asked if it was possible to get him in to see the upcoming foreign relations debate. It was; I called him the next day and told him I had arranged for a pass. And he was there, watching eagerly with his moist little eyes, when the Secretary got up to speak and there was that sudden unexpected yell, and the handful of Central American fanatics dragged out their weapons and began trying to change American policy with gunpowder.

You remember the story, I suppose. There were only three of them, two with guns, one with a hand grenade. The pistol men managed to wound two Senators and a guard. I was right there, talking to Connaught. I spotted the little fellow with the hand grenade and tackled him. I knocked him down, but the grenade went flying, pin pulled, seconds ticking away. I lunged for it. Larry Connaught was ahead of me.

The newspaper stories made heroes out of both of us. They said it was miraculous that Larry, who had fallen right on top of the grenade, had managed to get it away from himself and so placed that when it exploded no one was hurt.

For it did go off — and the flying steel touched nobody. The papers mentioned that Larry had been knocked unconscious by the blast. He was unconscious, all right.

He didn't come to for six hours and when he woke up, he spent the next whole day in a stupor.

I called on him the next night. He was glad to see

me.

"That was a close one, Dick," he said. "Take me back to Tarawa."

I said, "I guess you saved my life, Larry."

"Nonsense, Dick! I just jumped. Lucky, that's all."

"The papers said you were terrific. They said you moved so fast, nobody could see exactly what happened."

He made a deprecating gesture, but his wet little eyes were wary. "Nobody was really watching, I suppose."

"I was watching," I told him flatly.

He looked at me silently for a moment.

"I was between you and the grenade," I said. "You didn't go past me, over me, or through me. But you were on top of the grenade."

He started to shake his head.

I said, "Also, Larry, you fell *on* the grenade. It exploded underneath you. I know, because I was almost on top of you, and it blew you clear off the floor of the gallery. Did you have a bulletproof vest on?"

He cleared his throat. "Well, as a matter of —"

"Cut it out, Larry! What's the answer?"

He took off his glasses and rubbed his watery eyes. He grumbled, "Don't you read the papers? It went off a yard away."

"Larry," I said gently, "I was there."

He slumped back in his chair, staring at me. Larry Connaught was a small man, but he never looked smaller than he did in that big chair, looking at me as though I were Mr. Nemesis himself.

Then he laughed. He surprised me; he sounded almost happy. He said, "Well, hell, Dick — I had to tell somebody about it sooner or later. Why not you?"

I can't tell you all of what he said. I'll tell most of it — but not the part that matters.

I'll never tell *that* part to *anybody*.

Larry said, "I should have known you'd remember." He smiled at me ruefully, affectionately. "Those bull sessions in the cafeterias, eh? Talking all night about everything. But you remembered."

"You claimed that the human mind possessed powers of psychokinesis," I said. "You argued that just by the mind, without moving a finger or using a machine, a man could move his body anywhere instantly. You said that nothing was impossible to the mind."

I felt like an absolute fool saying those things; they were ridiculous notions. Imagine a man *thinking*



himself from one place to another! But — I had been on that gallery.

I licked my lips and looked to Larry Connaught for confirmation.

"I was all wet," Larry laughed. "Imagine!"

I suppose I showed surprise, because he patted my shoulder. He said, becoming sober, "Sure, Dick, you're wrong, but you're right all the same. The mind alone can't do anything of the sort — that was just a silly kid notion. But," he went on, "*but* there are — well, techniques — linking the mind to physical forces — simple physical forces that we all use every day — that can do it all. Everything! Everything I ever thought of and things I never thought of and things I haven't found out yet.

"Fly across the ocean? In a second, Dick! Wall off an exploding bomb? Easily! You saw me do it. Oh, it's work. It takes energy — you can't escape natural law. That was what knocked me out for a whole day. But that was a hard one; it's a lot easier, for instance, to make a bullet miss its target. It's even easier to lift the cartridge out of the chamber and put it in my pocket, so that the bullet can't even be fired. Want the Crown Jewels of England? I could get them, Dick!"

I asked, "Can you see the future?"

He frowned. "That's silly. This isn't supersti —"

"How about reading minds?"

Larry's expression cleared. "Oh, you're remembering some of the things I said years ago. No, I can't do that either, Dick. Maybe, some day, if I keep working at this thing — Well, I can't right now. There are things I can do, though, that are just as good."

"Show me something you can do," I asked.

He smiled. Larry was enjoying himself; I didn't begrudge it to him. He had hugged this to himself for years, from the day he found his first clue, through the decade of proving and experimenting, almost always being wrong, but always getting closer....He *needed* to talk about it. I think he was really glad that, at last, someone had found him out.

He said, "Show you something? Why, let's see, Dick." He looked around the room, then winked. "See that window?"

I looked. It opened with a slither of wood and a rumble of sashweights. It closed again.

"The radio," said Larry. There was a *click* and his little set turned itself on. "Watch it."

It disappeared and reappeared.

"It was on top of Mount Everest," Larry said, panting a little.

The plug on the radio's electric cord picked itself up and stretched toward the baseboard socket, then dropped to the floor again.

"No," said Larry, and his voice was trembling, "I'll show you a hard one. Watch the radio, Dick. I'll run it without plugging it in! The electrons themselves—"

He was staring intently at the little set. I saw the dial light go on, flicker, and hold steady; the speaker began to make scratching noises. I stood up, right behind Larry, right over him.

I used the telephone on the table beside him. I caught him right beside the ear and he folded over without a murmur. Methodically, I hit him twice more, and then I was sure he wouldn't wake up for at least an hour. I rolled him over and put the telephone back in its cradle.

I ransacked his apartment. I found it in his desk: All his notes. All the information. The secret of how to do the things he could do.

I picked up the telephone and called the Washington police. When I heard the siren outside. I took out my service revolver and shot him in the throat. He was dead before they came in.

For, you see, I knew Laurence Connaught. We were friends. I would have trusted him with my life. But this was more than just a life.

Twenty-three words told how to do the things that Laurence Connaught did. Anyone who could read could do them. Criminals, traitors, lunatics — the formula would work for anyone.

Laurence Connaught was an honest man and an idealist, I think. But what would happen to any man when he became God? Suppose you were told twenty-three words that would let you reach into any bank vault, peer inside any closed room, walk through any wall? Suppose pistols could not kill you?

They say power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And there can be no more absolute power than the twenty-three words that can free a man of any jail or give him anything he wants. Larry was my friend. But I killed him in cold blood, knowing what I did, because he could not be trusted with the secret that could make him king of the world.

But I can.

—FREDERIK POHL





## VAMPIRE'S FAST

by JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG

*Illustrated by Zoe*

*Ever since I wrote "Through The Moon Gate" for Andre Norton's Tales of the Witch World #2, I've wondered what Dorian St. James did to deserve falling through a gate into the Witch World. This tale explores his origins and nature long before that event.*

**T**he charred lump of flesh in his arms had been his daughter, or the closest thing to a daughter that his kind could know.

The vampire who, in San Francisco, called himself Malory Avnel, or sometimes Dorian St. James, gently lay the remains on the soft velvet couch, reading the area with all his senses. There were faint impressions in the lush rose carpet, mortal footprints.

A melange of scents lingered in the apartment as did faint, indefinable and unnameable traces of psychic presence.

As he knelt beside the blackened corpse, the events unrolled in his mind as if he were remembering them, though he'd been nowhere near at the time.

Rita had been sleeping the day away, as their kind must. Two large men had broken in. He could almost see them. Well groomed. Cologne. Hair spray. Freshly dry-cleaned wool suits. Real leather shoes. Guns. Garlic. Newly sawn ash stakes. Perhaps even silver crosses.

If he ever encountered them, he'd know them by their body odor. Scrubbing and deodorant couldn't

hide it. No two humans smelled alike. Most probably these two worked for Don Jose del Rio, the latest success in the drug import business.

It was Malory's habit to take the two kills a month he needed from among humans who killed other humans for profit. He considered drug dealers in that category since most modern addictions were deadly. Lately, he'd been preying on del Rio's middle-management, a singularly superstitious lot.

A few weeks ago, Malory had been surprised while feeding on a particularly satisfying kill, and had left the scene before disposing of the exsanguinated corpse.

Rita had also been feeding on del Rio's organization, and it was possible that she, too, had made an error, leading them to her. Or they might have found her through him.

The killers had left none of their paraphernalia behind. They hadn't needed to use it. Rita was so very young. Even when dragged from her sanctuary into the bright sun slanting in the window — it must have been about four p.m. from the angle — she hadn't been able to rouse herself enough to put up more than a token struggle.

Her sleeping robe was torn. There were broken bones in her left foot. And Malory hadn't been there to help.

Shaking with emotions he couldn't name, he knelt, gently placing his hands on the charred skull. It crumbled. "Rita, I swear by the gods of my fathers, the next blood I feast on will be that of your murderer — however long it takes."

His chin dropped to his chest, and he choked on the unutterable need to cry. But of course, he could not. He yanked himself away from the remains and went to the well concealed closet which was her sanctuary. He'd had workmen build it into the back wall of her kitchen, concealed to look like a shallow pantry. Then, he had erased their memories.

Now the shelf unit stood out from the wall next to the door. Inside, the bed was rumpled, a gold satin sheet spilling out onto the floor with a dirty shoe mark on it.

The whistling tea kettle had been knocked off the stove and lay on its side in a puddle.

He could almost hear her screams.

He shuddered, fighting the inward visions, the pain.

A long time later, careful to leave no trace of himself, he gathered the sheets, sealed the closet and

snapped the pantry shelves in front of it, breaking the lock so the next tenant would not find it. He cleaned up the tea kettle.

Then he rolled the charred remnants in the sheets, carried the bundle to the basement and disposed of it in the incinerator. It was the new, non-polluting kind. Even as young as she'd been, there'd be no traces left of a body.

And now, he knew, he needed help — mortal help. With the negligence of millennia of practice, he took bat form.

By three a.m. he was outside a town house a few blocks from his own, high on a cliff overlooking the ocean beach — an area that was usually heavily fogged in. He still had a few hours until the sun would drive him to sanctuary.

Resolute, he turned to mist and sifted through the screen into the bedroom of David Silver.

The human was snoring. Malory watched him fondly for a few moments, then whispered, "Dave! Dave, wake up!"

The snoring arrested in mid-breath, and with a mumble and a start, David Silver sat up in bed. Then he relaxed. "Oh, it's just you. What time is it?"

Malory told him, and Silver swore. "Why do you do this to me? Don't you know I need to sleep at night?"

"Rita's been killed."

"Oh. Is she okay?"

"No! Mortals broke into her sanctuary and exposed her to the sun. She's gone."

"Oh, no!" This time it was a cry of grief. For a time, the two had been lovers. Then Rita had become involved with Malory and decided to accept immortality, leaving Silver with this house and a whopping mortgage. Malory had extended the same offer to Silver, but he'd refused emphatically.

Malory waited as Silver worked through the shock, the brief rage at Malory for making her a vampire, the reverse of blame to himself for letting her do it, and the realization that it had been *her* choice to make. And then there were wracking sobs that didn't pass quickly at all.

Malory sat on the bed and put an arm around Silver's shoulders. For the vampire, the human's tears were a necessary cleansing he needed to share. When it was over, he felt the release into calm acceptance that he could not have achieved on his own. He let his forehead rest on Silver's shoulder, against his neck, to enhance the contact.

Sniffing, Silver asked, "Are you hungry?"

Malory pulled away. "No. I fed well only last night. I have sworn the next blood I take will be her killer's."

Silver pushed his bedclothes aside and threw on a robe. "Come on," he said leading the way to the kitchen. "Tell me the whole story. I have to know it all."

As Silver drank black coffee, Malory recounted what he knew. "So, Dave, I'm sworn to get them — and their boss as well. But I'm going to need help. Mortal help."

Silver studied the dregs of his coffee. "I'm a tailor. I don't even have my own business. I work for a department store. I was never even in the army. I'm in terrible shape and I'm hopelessly clumsy. What can I do that you can't?"

"Stay awake in the daytime — as my foes do."

"Foes. How poetic."

"I'm sorry. I read a lot."

Silver gave him a cockeyed smile. "Foes. Okay. They killed her. They're my foes, too. What do I do?"

"Guard me in the daytime. Let me use you to enlarge my sphere of awareness so none can come upon us unwarned."

"Malory, I can't guard you all day. I have to work."

"Quit your job. I'll put you on my payroll at double your current salary. Afterwards, you'll get a bonus that will let you open your own shop. Deal?"

"I didn't know you were that rich."

"I've had a while to work at it."

"I suppose. You've never said how old you are."

"I don't exactly know." He shrugged. "Millennia. Aren't you going to ask me what you really want to ask?"

"You keep saying you can't read my mind."

"It's more empathy and knowledge of human nature than telepathy. I said I want to use you, and you haven't objected to that. Why?"

"I hate thinking about what you are."

"If you're going to help me, you must think about it. You'll be my spare hands and eyes. I'll ruthlessly compel your actions — and they won't be slow or clumsy. If it comes to a fight, I'll use your body regardless of the injury it might take. But Dave — you could die."

Silver was looking at him as if he'd never seen him before. "You could do all that?"

"It's not even difficult."

"But you've never — I mean, I've never felt you—"

Malory reached across the table and took the man's hands in his own. "I wouldn't *ever* without your permission. Oh, I do erase memories, for my own security. And I cast illusions about myself. And I take blood from unknowing donors who never miss it. And, Dave, you know I kill humans for my own needs. But I have my own code of honor. I give you my word I've never used you, and I won't without your permission."

Silver studied him warily. "I can't quite imagine what it would feel like, but the thought makes my skin crawl."

"I could make it so you felt nothing — or I could take the memory away and leave a hole in your time, or I could fill it with the illusion of a Hawaiian vacation."

Silver pulled away and went around the counter into the kitchen to get more coffee. He came back chewing on one nail and stared out the sliding door to the patio. "I don't want to lose the memory or remember something that didn't happen. I want to feel and remember whatever happens to me. For me, life is to be lived, every detail of it, right to the end. And it should end all in God's own good time."

"If you like, I'll show you what it's like to be used."

Back to the vampire, Silver whispered, "Okay. Do it."

Malory closed his eyes and mentally reached for Silver, infiltrated his mind and took over his body. He made him walk back to the table, turn three times in place without sloshing the coffee, sit down, sip his coffee, and set the mug down without even rippling the surface. Then he made him grin and say, "That's amazing!" Then Malory let go.

That was the mistake. At the sudden return to normal, Silver turned white, lips slightly green, and plunged into the kitchen where he stood gripping the sink and gasping as if expecting to heave up all the coffee he'd drunk.

Malory was beside him in a blink, knowing that if he suppressed the nausea, he'd turn the man against him forever. He'd had permission for one demonstration, not two. So he just held Silver close. "I'm sorry. It's my fault. Breathe deeply. Hang on and breathe. It'll pass in a moment."

And it did. Malory led him back to the table, explaining, "I let go too abruptly for you. Most people don't react so violently. It won't happen again."

"Mal, I don't think I can take that. Even before — everything came unstuck — it was awful. I wasn't me. I even heard myself speak in my own voice, and it wasn't me."

His tone was the first indication Malory had that Silver had made up his mind to accept. "I can make it so you won't feel a sense of being — invaded — out of control."

Silver shook his head. "I don't want — Malory, if I don't help you, what are you going to do?"

"I'm sworn. I will kill them — one way or another."

"That's another thing. I don't want to kill anyone. I just want to put them in jail."

"For murdering a dead woman? Whose remains don't exist?"

"Yeah." But he added, "Do you know how many times they jail the wrong person for murder, no matter how careful they are? How can we be sure we've got the right people?"

"I can identify the hitmen. I only have to find them and discover who they work for. Then I've a plan, but I won't tell you unless you're with me — or I'd have to erase your memory to be sure it couldn't be tortured out of you."

His gaze went to the graying light behind the windows. "Oh, Lord, they could be out there. They could have followed you. They could be coming after us right now."

"They didn't. They aren't." At Silver's look, he said, "Being a vampire has to be good for something. Still, you're right, they just might trace you through Rita, and me through you. In the past, I've been attacked in my sanctuary during the day. The prospect frightens me, so I'm asking you to let me use you."

"And you had to find her like that. It must have been hell on you." He scrubbed his face. "You mean, using me, you could be aware of things that are going on even in the daytime, when you're asleep?"

"Yes. I need that because these people know the weaknesses of my kind."

"God, I'm being such a coward. It's not any worse than being raped."

Malory couldn't keep his reaction to that off his face. He wanted to run out of the house and never bother Dave again. But that wasn't an option. He needed the man. So he sat stiffly waiting.

Dave reached across the table. "I didn't mean it that way. You're a friend. I could get used to being used by you, temporarily anyway." He forced a grin.

"Hey, that was a neat trick with the coffee."

Malory found a smile and pasted it on. "Thought you might appreciate that."

"Okay, so tell me your plan. One way or another, we've got to do this — for Rita — so I'm in. Whatever it takes."

"It's fairly simple. Once I locate the hitmen, I'll lure them and their boss into my home. They'll come in the daylight expecting to kill me easily. But you and I'll be ready — and they'll die instead."

"You mean, you're going to use yourself as bait?"

"Yes."

"That must be like — like facing your worst nightmare."

"Yes. That's why I need you. These days, I've no other mortal friends I could trust for this."

"I'm ashamed. I shouldn't have hesitated to agree. Mal, do what you have to do so I can stand it. Don't let my — squeamishness — get in the way."

Malory rose, and Silver got up with him, glancing at the paling of the window. "I guess you've got to go."

"I was planning to stay here today. Remember the sanctuary I had built in your attic for Rita?"

"She never used it. I'd forgotten about it."

"With your permission —?"

"Well — sure. Are you afraid to go home?"

"It would be unwise. And — I wished to be near you. Through your awareness, I can be roused, even during the day, if needed. Tonight, I'll check my security arrangements."

Malory went to the window and examined the yard by the rising light. He had to admit it out loud. He owed the man that much. "And — Dave — I've been bereaved often in my time, but rarely so deeply. I just don't want to be alone."

"I kinda feel the same way. Everybody else I know thinks she's been dead for years."

"She has been, Dave, she has been."

It went easier than Malory had expected. By the time he'd settled into the attic sanctuary, he'd adjusted his touch on Silver's mind to leave Silver with the feel of his presence without the impression of being violated.

By noon, it had become comfortable for both of them. By sundown, they'd worked out signals that would let Silver ask for privacy, and let Malory ask for admission. The link was clear and pure, like holding a private mental conversation. It had been centuries since Malory had worked with such an easy link. He'd miss it desperately when this was over.

Silver spent the day on the phone arranging to take his three weeks vacation instead of giving three weeks notice. And he'd followed the detailed instructions Malory had left for ordering the construction work.

When Malory rose, Silver was packed to move to Malory's house. Things were already in progress there.

A decorator Malory'd used before had removed all the furniture from the living room and installed a large, carpeted pedestal in the center of the room, along with a grand piano in one corner, complete with silver candelabra.

The next day, workmen from a security contractor Malory relied on would rig the shutters on his living room windows — the huge bay windows overlooking the beach and Dave's house — to close when weight came onto the floor near the pedestal.

When Malory woke, he called the undertaker he'd had "bury" Rita years ago, and ordered an ostentatious coffin to be delivered — black with a red satin lining. It would fit perfectly on the pedestal.

Late that night, visiting the security contractor at his home in San Jose, Malory carefully planted instructions to have the coffin altered. When the lid was raised by outside handles, an anesthetic spray

would saturate the area. He also had invisible spy cameras placed all about the living room, the monitors banked in the bedroom just above it.

The automatic devices installed in the living room could also be controlled from a console in that bedroom. The console could also flood the lower floor with CO<sub>2</sub> foam. That would be Silver's station during the days of waiting.

It was a long, tedious job to implant the details of the instructions then erase the memory of who'd given the orders. The workmen, he'd take care of as they finished their jobs.

With that done, Malory rechecked every sanctuary he had installed around the Bay Area, every lookout he had planted at key locations near those sanctuaries, every point where any mortal might pick up a lead on his activities. But there was no hint that del Rio's people had found him.

—JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG

*continued next issue*

# Galaxy

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## FORECAST

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for the theme issues coming up soon. We're trying to time the womens' issue for the vernal equinox if stories reach us on time for editing, typesetting, proofing, etc. — and it's the etc. that worries us most. That's the stuff that happens after the camera-ready is ready for presstime.

There are some real treats and surprises in store for GALAXY readers in the coming months. One of the most wonderful surprises for GALAXIANS everywhere is that Floyd C. Gale has agreed to run the GALAXY 5-Star Shelf again!

Stay tuned for incredible news from GALAXY!

Like the second acts of two thoroughly exciting plays, next month's installments of Jacqueline Lichtenberg's *VAMPIRE'S FAST* and Robert Sheckley's *CITY OF THE DEAD* lead us on through the intricate headspaces of two of the world's greatest writers.

Prepare yourself for some fabulous stories by your favorites and ours — and be on the lookout





## PERFECTLY PRESERVED

by CHUCK ROTHMAN

*Illustrated by Metzger*

The ancient fluorescent lights flickered on, illuminating the whiteness of the cryogenic chamber. A bone-chilling cold permeated the air.

"Perfectly preserved," whispered Lorin, looking over the myriad rows of man-sized tubes. "The automatic power never failed, even during the worst of the wars."

Beside him, Klaak was awed nearly to speechlessness. "So many of them."

Lorin smiled at the boy's reaction, so much like his own when he was young. "From the 21st century," he said, appraising the age of the units. "Maybe older. Waiting here until we had advanced enough to thaw

them out." He surveyed the containers with a look of satisfaction. "Let's tell the rest."

They retraced their path through the ancient rubble until they reached the surface.

The others waited anxiously on the barren ground. There was much that their ancestors could provide.

Lorin smiled as all eyes went to him. "Look, they're perfectly preserved," he said. A roar of delight came from the tribe and a chant, "Fresh meat tonight!" rang out spontaneously as they bore several revered ancestors back to the village, to prepare the new year's very first Thanksgiving Roast.

—CHUCK ROTHMAN



## WHAT COMES NATURALLY

by GREG COSTIKYAN

*Illustrated by Larsen*

**W**e've only got six minutes of fuel left, Flight Captain, said the game. Desperately, I punched at the control console. A line of holes stitched the left wing, and an engine began to sputter. *We're going down, Cap'n!* A holographic explosion filled the viewspace, to be replaced by the **Crawford Entertainment** logo.

"Where'd you get the game, boy?" Pa demanded from the doorway.

"Huh? Jimmy copied it for me."

"Copied, eh? You didn't pay for it, then."

I blinked. "Well, no, Pa. He just copied it. Took maybe fifteen seconds."

Pa grunted. "Yep, easy as pie. Comes natural, does piracy."

Oh, crap. Janie's head peered round the door,

smirking; she could always tell when I was gonna get it. But Pa just pulled over a chair and sat down.

"Now, see here, son," he said. "When you buy a game, you ain't paying for the memory bubble and the box. You're payin' for maybe a coupla man-years of work. The cost of the product is labor and imagination, not materials. A man's got a right to the fruits of his own intellectual endeavor. When you copy a game, you're stealin' — same's when you sneak out the door to the gun store with a box of shells in your pocket." I winced; that was *last year's* transgression.

"How long you played that game?" Pa asked.

"Total?" I said. "Maybe...twenty hours. Good game."

"Right," said Pa. "I got a load of LA Times just in;

after you help me shred 'em and feed the sheep, you and me's going down to the software store and you're gonna buy yourself a legal copy."

"But Pa! That'll be a couple million NewBucks!"

"You got the money in the bank, boy. Won't kill you."

"But Pa!" I'd worked *hard* for that money.

Complaining didn't do me any good, though. I followed Pa out to the feed lot and shredded the newspapers. Janie went to look at her ewe and lambs. Pa fed paper shreds by handfuls to the lambs.

"Great critters, these geneteeered sheep," Pa said fondly, running his fingers through wool.

"Sure saves bucks on the feed bill," I said. They thrived on newsprint. Seemed to like the color supplements best.

Pa went over to look at Janie's sheep. They were her 4-H project: She was raising them until they were old enough to sell. Would have depressed me — you hafta slaughter sheep young. Only a few grow up to breed the next generation. Generally, Pa didn't keep any; he bought pregnant ewes from *Milehi Geneteering*, fattened the lambs, and sold them to meat processors. But he'd let Janie raise a little ram, and breed her own.

Janie loved that farm, and loved 4-H. Me, I wanted off, soon's I was able.

Pa was pitchforking shredded paper into the feed trough. "Where you goin', boy?" he shouted.

"Down to the mall with Jimmy," I shouted back — then noticed the absence of the hover truck.

"Ma and Janie's got the hover," Pa said. "Took Janie and her lambs to the County Fair."

Crap. I wasn't going anywhere.

"Sides," said Pa, "I gotta load of Portland Oregonians coming in. Need you ta help me run the shredder."

"But Pa..." Some days you just can't win.

Must have been three, four hours later, county cops showed up. Ma and Janie sat in the back of the police hover, looking kinda scared behind the iron grille, some guy in a business suit sat in the front seat. Pa pulled up his overalls. "What the crap is this?" he shouted. Stupid, if you ask me. I know better than to yell at cops. They'll lay open your head, give 'em half a chance.

"You Charles Johnson?" asked the deputy.

"Sure thing."

"You the father of Jane Johnson?"

"Betcha."

"You're under arrest."

"What for?"

"Bio-piracy."

"What the crap?"

"This is Mr. Ehara from *Milehi Geneteering*. Says you been illegally copying his sheep."

Pa didn't know what to say.

"Mr. Johnson," said Ehara, "these sheep are genetically engineered under U.S. Patent 92, 788, 346. Under US patent law, it's a federal crime to illegally copy a patented device."

"Copy a patented device?" said Pa in a daze.

"Didn't you read your WetWare agreement?" asked Ehara. "We sell you the sheep for meat-processing purposes only. You're *not* allowed to *breed* them, Mr. Johnson."

"Well, *dang*," said Pa. "Them sheep was only doing what comes naturally."

The cops hauled 'em off: Janie, our little felon, heh-heh; Ma and Pa, too—they was in *loco parentis*. Felons, all. They'd probably let 'em out on bail; meantime, I got the spread to myself. I found the key to Pa's liquor cabinet and gave Jimmy a call.

We were going to have us one hell of a good time, yessireeBob!

—GREG COSTIKYAN

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## CIGARBOX

by DAVID KYLE

*Illustrated by Larsen*

When grandma died she left a cigarbox filled with bits and pieces of memorabilia from my childhood. The box held a remarkable secret — she had shaped my life by reading my future.

The last time I saw her alive, she was propped up in her huge bed, almost drowning in her antique comforter — the cigarbox was in her lap. "Inside this little cigar box are my treasures," she told me. "Some day you will see them. And I will tell you things." But she was weak and drained of energy and didn't open the box. "Tomorrow I will tell you everything." I sensed a mystery. I waited impatiently from visit to visit for the tomorrow that did not come. Within two

months she was gone.

After the funeral when I was back at the house, my wife and I and the old housekeeper sorted out her things before the sale. It was then — just before they auctioned it all off — that I got the cigarbox and opened it up. My wife, a practical person, had some faint hope that besides the inevitable letters and photographs we would discover money and jewels and valuable papers, which could have made our life easier and assisted us toward planned parenthood. The money was only a few old copper coins; the papers, souvenirs from past events — and the jewels...an ivory wedding ring, beads with a plastic crucifix, bracelets with religious designs, American Indian earrings —



and a little crystalline stone, its natural, unpolished facets thrusting up from its rough base. The crystal, wrapped in crumpled paper, was about the size and shape of the two joints of my thumb.

It looked valuable to me, and immediately I knew that *this* was where the mystery lay...Without really thinking, yet careful to shield my action from my wife and mother, I pocketed the wrapped stone...silently claiming it for myself.

That little box held a wealth of memories from my childhood, almost exclusively devoted to me. There had been a faded picture of my grandfather, young and handsome in his uniform, taken shortly before his death; a dozen pictures of my father at various ages in his life — all rather grim-faced, if not simply sullen, for with his chronic illnesses he never had been a happy man. I was surprised at how suppressed those memories had become. Obviously, though, I had been the warm sunbeam in my grandmother's life...however, thinking of her now was like peering into a swirling mist in my mind. Pleasant images, somewhat out-of-focus, came to me as I held the crystal. I was overpowered by my feeling of love for her.

I had been her only grandchild — so very important to her. We had been best friends to each other. At the time when my father moved us away from her home, I was twelve and very upset. But she told me then that it was all for the best. Over the years I would occasionally visit her, but she grew very old and her mind slowly, gradually lost its focus. My wife and I would go back to the old homestead for visits, but my greatest regret was that she never saw nor enjoyed her great-grandchildren to come, but I had always brought great joy to her.

Always? No, not always. One evening, alone, I suddenly, vividly, remembered. That crystalline stone, loosely wrapped in paper in the palm of my hand, became the one terrible time in my youth. Once in my past, and only once, as a boy, my conduct had been a terrible disappointment to my mother. I remember her screaming at me and taking me into the bathroom for the paddling I deserved, something my frequently absent father never did. My mother's rage — "Stealing! The shame of it! For a piece of glass! How could you do this to the family! I'm so embarrassed! I don't care if he said you should keep it to remind you of your sin. I'll never be able to go into that store again! Tomorrow you will have to take it back."

And I had protested, "The man who caught me said — if I promised not to do it again — ever — he

would forgive me and give it to me. I promised him. He warned you'd yell at me — but forgive me, too."

She was unfair, I thought, much too agitated to be reasonable, so I suffered both emotionally and physically. I promised never to steal again, and I cried and ran to grandmother at the first opportunity.

While my mother fumed, grandmother took the stone and called the store owner and apologized for my behavior and for my mother's hysteria and agreed to keep the glass stone only if he would accept payment for it. "I want my grandson to keep it always...to remind him of his mistake and of your kind understanding," she told him on the phone. He sent her a written reply, a sort of combined receipt and best-wishes note, I was led to believe — and forgave my petty theft as an irresistible temptation. All this we hid from my mother for her own peace of mind.

That was the stone which now, in my hand, brought the memories flooding back. I recalled that from time to time, she used to produce the crystal from some hidden place, and set it upright on its flat end on the mantelpiece for a day or two after I had done something which she felt was exceptionally wrong. Before I married, she held the stone in her cupped hands and predicted our lifeline of happiness. What had to be, she said, had to be.

This bizarre fortune telling had begun with my sneaky theft years ago — was it now ending with another sneaky theft by me?

I understood that childhood conspiracy of silence shared with my grandmother. My very religious mother would have protested the keeping of the stolen object. As for my father, we never did communicate anyhow. When I took a wife, I confided all I knew to her although it meant she feared for my soul. So, the years had passed.

Then, on this evening as I held the stone in my hand, the thought suddenly struck me that I had overlooked the obvious. *The crumpled piece of paper* around the stone could have some significance. The paper was certainly of fine quality, high in rag-content, like thin parchment. With extreme care, I flattened it out into a small square. It was as soft as cloth from an age long ago, yellowed but not brittle; a faint gray spidery design seemed to be traced on one side. Was that writing? I held it closely under the strong desk lamp, and peered closely at it through the powerful magnifying glass.

Slowly, as if by a conjurer's trick, I saw words faintly forming.



By straining my eyes, looking hard, writing down bits of what I seemed to see, I read a message.

*Dear Madame, I expected your call... I accept your payment... The lifelines stone is yours... Your grandson's action was inevitable... Through you, the crystal foretells his paths... As the stone has found you, fate has found its way to me. Now I can die. Good wishes and farewell, until... There was no signature.*

The man who wrote the note, the man who had been my victim and who had made us his victim, had indeed, died weeks later. My mother for a long time seemed to carry a sense of vicarious guilt that her son had contributed to his passing. My grandmother accepted the situation without any visible reaction and never mentioned him nor the note.

As these thoughts passed through my head, the words on the ancient paper seemed to blur into illegibility. My scrawled notes were still there, unaffected, but the old paper had only the suggestion of writing on it, as before. Perhaps I had imagined the words I had seen...or perhaps an old memory had returned?

I held the crystal up to one eye. I looked into it

deeply. There was life flickering within, vague and misty behind the faint network of lines. The next day I took the crystal to a jeweler. Was it unusual? Did it have great value? No, it was a simple unpolished stone — unpolished, despite my vigorous efforts to rub up the stone into a sparkling brilliance. I complained of the tiny scratches on its many faces. The usual growth lines of a natural stone, he said. Lustre would come with their removal. So, with his diamond dust wheel, he polished it. As the lines disappeared, the crystal's brilliance grew.

My crystal was now a glittering gem. Its surfaces were alive with light. I held it up close to one eye again. What I saw was also different. In its heart it was dead. The realization of what I had done came to me with a sickening rush of horror. *Lifelines!* I had not understood the full meaning of the word. I had scrubbed away its natural, magical power. Irretrievably gone.

Oh, grammar, how could I have known?

— DAVID KYLE

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## LET SLEEPING SIGILS LIE

by LAWRENCE SCHIMEL

*Illustrated by van Rijn*

A chill of magic ran down Isabel's spine as she bent to pick a handful of blue morels. She glanced about the forest with her magesight — the trees glowing amber with amethyst dryads nestled in their centers, the ground outlined in pale green with occasional yellow nebulae, the mushrooms she reached for, the electric blue of summer lightning — but nowhere saw any magic out of the ordinary. Isabel puzzled over the warning she had felt as she stared at the mushrooms again without the magesight, then picked them, tucking them into a pouch at her waist.

Isabel stood again, stretching the muscles in her legs and flexing her knees. She took a last peek at the forest under magesight before the trip home.

To her right, a red glow, partly obscured by the trees and underbrush. Isabel moved cautiously,

scanning the ground around her for traps. As she drew nearer, Isabel recognized it was a sigil. Invisible to normal sight, her magesight assured her that she stood before it.

The sigil was of protection, designed to protect an object from physical harm. It was a basic glyph, learned early in apprenticeship. "But why would someone construct one out here?" Isabel whispered to herself. It seemed useless. Unless it was being used to cover some other magic as a misdirection. Isabel looked deeper with her magesight and saw the boy trapped under the sigil, lying under one of the glyph's markings so as to be hidden by it. She had to free him. She reached into the half-realm where the sigil actually rested, and broke the edge of the glyph. It snapped as easily as a twig, and Sigil and boy became visible to normal sight again.

The sigil had been constructed from natural objects lying nearby. A curved branch formed an arc of the circle, followed by a string of river pebbles. One of the inside strokes of the glyph was made from a patch of blue morels like those she had sought, and a furrow traced part of the bottom arc. The rest of the sigil was constructed from deadwood and twigs. The boy lay twisted, as if he were still trapped under the mark of the glyph. Isabel checked with her magesight to see if he were still under another spell, but found none.

Looking at him with normal sight again, she found him sitting upright in the center of the glyph, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "What did you have to wake me up for? It will take forever to find another twig that size to replace the one you broke." He pointed to the broken twig at Isabel's feet.

"You did this to yourself?"

"Of course I did. Couldn't you see I was part of the glyph?"

Isabel stared at him dumbly for a moment. "Actually, I thought you were trapped under it. I couldn't believe anyone would just build a protection glyph out here in the middle of nowhere unless they were hiding something."

"I was hiding something," the boy stood and faced Isabel, flailing emphatically with his arms. "I was hiding myself. I didn't want to get eaten while I was asleep. It's very safe in there. If I'm part of a glyph, I sink into the half-realm with it. Safe, that is, unless meddling mages come by and break your sigils."

"I'm sorry," Isabel said calmly, trying to ignore the formulae for various curses which seemed on the tip of her tongue. "I thought I was doing you a favor by setting you free."

"Well, you weren't. You woke me up, after only three hours. And I was having the nicest dreams..." He looked dreamy as his eyes lost focus, remembering.

"I'll let you get back to sleep then, and be on my way. Sorry, again, for having awakened you."

The boy woke out of his trance. "Hey, not so fast." He smiled, beatifically. "You could at least help me find another twig to replace the one you broke."

Isabel sighed. She guessed it was the least she could do after having broken his sigil in the first place.

Isabel stepped out of the scribe's shop, holding her new book in a bag at her side. As she walked down the street, she thought about how she would sit with a pot of tea and a long candle and read late into

the night. Behind her was the sound of running feet. As Isabel began to turn towards the noise, the bag was torn out of her grasp. She tried to hold onto it, but the cutpurse had it firmly, and kept running up the street. Isabel bolted after him, knowing that if she stopped to cast a spell, he would get away down some alley before she was done. Sure enough — on the next block he ducked into an alley. Isabel followed right behind him, her arms swinging wildly as she rounded the corner too quickly. He was already at the end of the alley, turning left. Isabel sprinted after him, and suddenly felt her back spasm as she found herself in the middle of a spell.

She panicked. "Of all the stupid things," she berated herself while she broke free, "to walk into a trap like this." The spell tore easily; it was a simple sigil which she broke without setting it off.

"What?" a familiar voice groggily mumbled behind her. "Oh, I should have known it would be you again."

Isabel turned around, dreading. It was that boy again. He was lying on the floor of the alleyway, debris spread around him in the form of a protection sigil.

"Why?" Isabel screamed at no one in particular, "Why me?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Why can't a body get any sleep around these parts? How do you expect me to grow if you keep waking me up?"

"Sleep! Do you know that because of you I just lost a rare spellbook that I paid 300 crowns for? And you come to me crying about sleep! I've a mind to rend you limb from limb and then you'll rest in peace!"

"Well, aren't we cranky today? That time of the month again, when you go yelling and screaming and waking up little children?"

Isabel raised her hand to slap him, then controlled her rage. "The mouth on you!" She whispered a spell at the barrel of trash at the end of the alley, which proceeded to upend itself over the boy. "Lie there in the trash. It's where you belong." Isabel walked away, still fuming, both at the boy and the loss of her book.

The farmer's fields were under heavy curses, the causes of a rather severe blight. Magic was laced through the corn and wheat as thick as the weeds. "This," Isabel told herself, in a high, melodramatic tone, "is the problem with being a mage in the employ of the town in which you live. Whatever happened to

the good old days of fighting off dragons and going on quests?"

Isabel sized up the fields again, deciding on spells to use and how much energy she would need to perform each part. "Who're you trying to kid, Iz? You were always happier tinkering with a garden than running around on some quest. And you never once fought a dragon." Isabel talked to herself whenever she worked with plants, as well as to the plants themselves. It helped them grow.

Isabel formed the glyph images in her mind. "Everybody ready now?" she asked the fields of wheat and corn before her. She reached out with her mind and began stripping magic from the field, peeling away layers of curses that were heaped on like manure — spells, cantrips, glyphs, sigils — every sort of magic that could be cast. "Someone really had it in for this farmer. Those spells must have cost a fortune." Isabel clenched her jaw as she began to concentrate harder. "Maybe he owed some mage his firstborn or something, and welched on the debt. Even at the town's rates my fees would have been that high to do something like this." Sweat began to bead on Isabel's brow. "If I ever decided to do something like this."

Even cleared of curses, the crops were still suffering. Isabel took a deep breath, stretched her arms and legs, and cracked her back. She looked up at the sky with her magesight, found enough moisture there, and began to cast a long, slow spell to cause a soft rain. Drops began to fall on her upturned face and Isabel smiled. To mess with the weather was a tricky affair; it was so easy for things to get out of hand, often with disastrous consequences. But even concentrating on keeping the weather under control, Isabel found the rain soothing, after the hard work of removing the curses. She stood on the edge of the field, being bathed with the crops and feeling happy and contented at a job well done.

Out of the corner of her eye Isabel saw a movement. She drew a portion of her attention from the storm and glanced in its direction. Down her back came the warming flash of magic being used and Isabel loosed control of the rain to face the threat. A scarecrow ambled haphazardly toward her, as if the person controlling the spell did not know how to use it, or did not have the control to keep it going very well. The scarecrow would stumble in her direction, rest a moment, then veer off to the side when it moved again. Slowly it zig-zagged its way toward her.

Tracing the spell back to its controller, Isabel

recognized the boy from the sigils and somehow resisted the urge to scream. He couldn't tell that he'd been discovered. She smiled, viciously, and began remembering all those curses she had just lifted from the farmer's fields. "So he thinks he can be rude to a mage and get away with it, does he? We'll see about that. If he wants to play rough, then we'll just have to play rough." Isabel reviewed all the curses she knew, and found one ideally suited for an upstart teen like him. She cast it at him slowly, taking time to savor the sweet feeling of revenge. He wouldn't be bothering her anymore.

Around her a storm began to rage, rain beating down on the crops weakened by blight. Isabel cursed in frustration that this distraction had allowed the storm to get out of hand. Wind whipped her hair, stinging her eyes. Isabel struggled to regain control of the storm and it fought her, wind and rain growing more violent in a frenzied peak before her trained mind wrested the power back. The wind died abruptly, and the rain slowed to a drizzle. The crops drooped miserably. Tired and completely drained, Isabel hoped the brat caught a cold.

When the eggs she had just purchased slipped from her basket and cracked against the sidewalk, Isabel knew things were about to get worse. She was afraid to look up the street to where her house stood; just an ordinary house, one of a row of similar small houses on the street. It had been a peaceful two days since her last warning, since her run-in with that foul-mouthed boy....

"No!" Isabel cried as she ran toward her house. As she drew nearer she saw that three of the pickets were missing from the fence, as well as her two, extremely rare, specially hybridized rose bushes. "No, no, no, no, Noooo!" she cried again. "Why?!"

Isabel did not even need to use her magesight to know that the protection sigil was there. She sighed wistfully, looking at the missing rose bushes, and thought of her two days of peace. Isabel placed her basket on the front porch then turned back to the sigil. She closed her eyes, steadied herself, then calmly broke the edge of the sigil. Boy, pickets, and rose bushes all came into sight.

The boy rubbed sleep out of his eyes, looked up and saw Isabel looming over him, and screamed. Isabel smothered the smile which tried to creep onto her face. The case of acne with which she had cursed him was glowing slightly, even though it was not very



dark. "I'm sorry," the boy continued. "I really am. I didn't mean what I said. Please forgive me."

"Tell me something; why are you tormenting me? What did I ever do to you that you're haunting me now?"

"I'm not. It's purely by accident."

"Accident? You expect me to believe that it's an accident that you chose my house out of which to construct your sigil? To use my rare hybrid rose bushes as part of your little prank? Just be thankful you didn't harm them!"

"Honestly, it was an accident. I didn't know it was your house. I would never have used it if I'd known." The feeling's mutual, Isabel thought.

"Well, I'm not going to stand for this little joke any longer. Tell me why you keep doing this and then stay away from me. Go back to your master and torment him."

"I don't have a master. I don't have anything." He gestured at the remains of his sigil. "These keep me safe from almost everything. And what it doesn't, I couldn't stop anyway. You think I'm doing this as a joke?"

Isabel considered him carefully, to make sure he wasn't trying to play off her pity. "If you haven't got a master or someplace to stay, then why are you sleeping all the time? You should be working, trying to make a living, instead of getting in the way of old women minding their own business."

"It's easier if I sleep all the time. I'm less hungry that way."

Isabel didn't care if he was just playing off her pity, he was good at it. Too good at it, Isabel thought, as she felt the knife in her heart twist again. She sighed. She would never have imagined that she would ever be kind to him, ever say something like this to him after the way he had treated her. But she took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and managed to spill out the words, quickly, "Do you want something to eat?"

The boy stared at her silently for a long moment. "Are you sure?"

"Yes." But make it fast, before I change my mind. "Come on in." Isabel walked to the porch. She picked up her basket, then turned to find him still lingering at the gate. "Come on," she repeated and walked into her house, leaving him to follow or not as he chose. She had made the attempt, offering him food, ignoring his earlier remarks and actions. He followed her in.

"First, let me give you something to clear up that

acne. If I'm going to talk to you while you eat I don't want to be looking at it the entire time." Isabel looked at him over her shoulder as she unpacked the groceries from her basket onto their proper shelves of pantry. "Besides, it glows too brightly indoors."

Isabel tried not to giggle, but his acne glowing violently green was nearly too much for her. She busied herself with putting the foodstuffs away and asked him what he wanted to eat.

"Anything's fine," he replied, standing before her wall of spices and herbs.

"Anything," Isabel sighed. "Fine. So tell me what happened to your master," she asked, trying to make conversation.

There was a crash, followed closely by a bright blue flash. Isabel spun around, dropping the three parsnips she held. The boy now glowed electric blue, with kelley-green polkadots where his acne showed through. Around him was the powdered dust from the blue morels she had picked earlier in the week, their container in shards at his feet.

He looked so pitiful, and yet so funny, glowing green and blue, that Isabel could not help laughing.

"Don't you know not to touch? Well, don't just stand there; clean up the mess you've made. Better yet, *don't*. Sit there, and *don't move*."

Shortly before dawn, Isabel breezed up the stairs without a creak and quietly opened the door to his bedroom. He lay in bed, still soundly asleep. Isabel watched him for a moment as the light grew stronger, dimming the bluish glow his face still retained. She whispered a spell at the neighbor's rooster, waking him a bit early. She counted to ten and was rewarded by the sound of crowing from the fence between the neighbor's and her cottage. Isabel moved to the bed, leaned over him, and shook him vigorously. "Rise and shine, you lazy apprentice. The sun's up."

He woke with a start, sitting rigid in the middle of the bed, his face pale, his jaws agape with shock. Isabel smiled. She had wanted to do that for days now.

"Out of bed, I said. There's work to be done."

He looked at her grinning face, let everything sink in, then flopped backwards into the pillows, pulling the covers over his head.

Isabel smiled. She would enjoy having an apprentice again.





## THE MAN WITH NINE LIVES

### Vincent Price 1911 - 1993

by FORREST J ACKERMAN

Photo by Daugherty

VINCENT LEONARD PRICE JR. became the senior citizen of sinister cinema in the latter years of his life, following in the footsteps of Lon Chaney Sr., Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. But more than a macabre filmmonster star, St. Vincent (as he was regarded by his fans), as a whole person was a Renaissance man.

(1) Consummate movie actor, yes, also in mundane movies such as *Laura* and (his favorite) *The Eve Of St. Mark*. In the Cecil B. DeMille biblical spectacle *The Ten Commandments* he essayed the dramatic role of an Egyptian architect.

(2) One-man show and spellbinding raconteur. He took on the persona of the controversial Oscar Wilde and portrayed him more than 800 times.

(3) Art critic and connoisseur par excellence. His home in the Hollywood hills was a treasure trove of classic paintings and vintage sculptures.

(4) Legitimate stage actor, playing opposite the grand dame of the theatre, Helen Hayes, in *Victoria Regina*.

(5) Radio actor directed by the 22-year-old genius who panicked America with the *War Of The Worlds* broadcast, Orson Welles. Among other roles for Welles he played Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* and the Devil in *Damn Yankees*.

(6) Author. With his son Vincent Barrett, he co-authored a book about filmmonsters and authored a "visual autobiography", "I Like What I Know", which he brought up to date in 1978.

(7) Kitchen cook king with a book of recipes to his credit

and an appearance on the Johnny Carson show, demonstrating his Gustatory techniques.

(8) Television personality, appearing in episodes of *Mystery Show*, *Science Fiction Theater*, *Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, *Batman*, *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea*, *Night Gallery*, *Time Express*, *Alfred Hitchcock* and, among numerous others, *Lights Out*. But as long as there are movie theaters, TV and videocassettes, it will never be lights out for Vincent Price. He was honored by the Count Dracula Society and the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, and in recent years received a Grimmy on the nationally televised awards show, *Horror Hall of Fame*.

He played approximately 50 roles in imagi-movies and TV terrorvision tales, titles which come to mind including *House Of Wax*, *Master Of The World*, *The Tangler*, *The Fall Of The House Of Usher*, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, *The Raven*, *The Pit And The Pendulum* and *The House On Haunted Hill*.

(9) I knew him personally as a *human* being. Real *mensch*. One of Nature's noblemen. Kind, considerate, charitable, humble, caring—all these positive attributes and more should be summed up in any dictionary as: Vincent Price. It is occasionally said upon the passing of a great man, "We shall not see his kind again." This could be said of Vincent Price. I will say it. In fact I will say it again: "We shall not see his kind again."

Sleep well, Sweet Price.

--FORREST J ACKERMAN



## LAST APPOINTMENT

by ARTHUR JEAN COX

*Illustrated by Durer*

Doctor Ives sits alone in his laboratory. Alone, because Death has come for his co-workers, one by one. He sits on a stool beside his work-counter, shirt sleeve rolled back past the left elbow. On the counter by that elbow, a watch, at which he glances from time to time as if afraid of missing an appointment. He glances at it now: the time is 4:17 and 12 seconds.

In his right hand he holds a syringe.

He is a fairly young man, surely not more than thirty-five, but with prematurely white hair. He and his colleagues have been laboring for years on a drug to extend human longevity...and which the newsmedia persist in calling "an immortality serum" — a sensationalistic phrase that generated scoffing publicity and interfered with funding. Still, they had pressed on, and for much of the last few years had felt themselves separated from success only by the

narrowest of margins. Again and again, it had seemed within their grasp and, again and again, they had been proven fatally wrong. One by one, Death had come for them, and only he is left.

After the deaths of two volunteer subjects and Doctor Arthur Lake, Nobel Laureate and Head of the Institute, the Government had forbidden further testing of this series of drugs on human subjects. But those who were left — unable to relinquish the great prize that lay so close at hand (the mayflies had lived a whole year now with no noticeable ill-effects) — had carried on their research in secret.

Each had injected himself. And each had died within five minutes.

But today, the youngest and last-surviving member of team has succeeded in detecting and repairing the subtle defect in the molecular structure of the pseudo-enzyme that had caused the brain to

send its heart-stopping message.

"This time," he thinks aloud; "this time, it has to work."

He will soon find out, for now — 4:17 and 30 seconds — is the Moment of Truth, there being no excuse for further delay. He punctures the blue vein in his left arm with the needle, pushes home the plunger. And he thinks, *If I can just survive that first five minutes...*

He lays down the syringe and sits with two fingers on his pulse and his eyes on the watch. 4:18 and 18 seconds. He finds that his pulse is racing and that the drug is having a curious effect on him — anyway, he *thinks* it's the drug: for out of the corner of his right eye he seems to see something: a dim, dark figure perhaps, standing in the northwest corner of the laboratory by the door. He supposes it possible that his fear has fashioned something to justify itself, but he is determined not to yield to panic and he keeps his eyes riveted on the watch.

4:20 and 17 seconds.

And at that moment, a shocking — almost heart-stopping — thing: the locked door of the laboratory flings itself noiselessly open...A figure enters; a figure about his own height, perhaps a little taller; a faintly smiling face atop a figure clothed in shadow; it glides toward him along the floor, and speaks in a gentle voice ringing with whimsical humor.

"Doctor Ives, I presume."

Ives, congealed, can barely nod his head.

"You know me?"

Ives hears a voice — his own? — replying softly, *"I know you."*

"I have an appointment with you at" — he takes an antique time-piece from some fold of his robe; it is of course a stop-watch — "4:22 and 22 seconds."

Ives' heart bounds as he snatches at an absurd and unworthy hope. "It's not quite that yet."

"I'll wait," says Death, with an ironical smile. "I'm sometimes early," he explains, seating himself on a chair facing the doctor, "but never late."

"I was so sure I'd solved that last problem!" Ives groans. "If I'd only had one more day..."

Death laughs, raises a protesting hand. *"Please! Please spare me! Everyone* thinks I have come at an inconvenient time, so spare me your excuses, your objections, your whines. You can't imagine how many uncountable times I've heard them. It would weary me, if I were capable of being wearied. But," and

again that ironical and somewhat boastful smile, "nothing wearies me, for I am Immortal. You must resign yourself. I am that Solitary Messenger who comes, sooner or later, to fetch every man."

"Solitary?" repeats Ives. "Solitary!" — with a spasm of bitterness, for he has an outraged sense of being too much set upon. "Then who's *that* over *there*?" He indicates with his finger the northwest corner of the room.

For a flickering fraction of a second, Death is baffled. Then he smiles at the childishness of this trick. Nevertheless, he negligently, contemptuously, allows himself to glance in that direction...and freezes. A tall figure, looming almost to the ceiling, stands in that corner of the room. A dark figure, whose robe is woven of the same material as is Death's, but with little gleaming points of light like a night sky.

This figure leaves the corner and glides towards the two of them as silently as a lengthening shadow.

The blood drains from Death's face.

The Great Figure hovers over them. It raises an arm, exposing a pale wrist upon which is a watch — a digital chronometer. The time is 4:22 and 22 seconds.

And It lays Its great hand not upon Ives, but upon Death's shoulder, as if arresting Death.

Death stares upward, wide-eyed. His mouth flails open and he stammers questions, objections, pleas, but to no avail: he is as helpless as any mere mortal in the grip of this greater Being; under Its prompting, Death rises from the chair and is swallowed up in a slow swirling movement of the dark and glittering robe as It turns away; but his muffled voice can still be heard protesting weakly — *"This cannot be!"* — as the two glide from the room and are gone. The door swings noiselessly shut behind them.

For a moment Ives sits paralyzed. With pity. Not for himself. For Death. *Poor Death!*

The next moment — 4:22 and 30 seconds — he throws back his head and shouts with laughter.

For he is alive! He has survived the five minutes! The fatal obstacle has been overcome and the longevity serum is at work in his body.

*"Longevity..."* The laughter dies in his throat.

Longevity? How long is longevity?

Victorious and silent, trembling with speculation, Doctor Ives sits alone in his laboratory.

—ARTHUR JEAN COX



## CYBERACTIONS

by J. W. DONNELLY

*Illustrated by Daumier*

The world had been so long at peace, the major problems so long ago eradicated, few safeguards were required, or even desired. It was the age of electronics and machines. Few people still worked. Who had to, with robotic machines of every type to handle the sundry labors that supported a high-tech society? This was an era of leisure; everyone had time on their hands. Freed from the burden of struggling to feed and clothe itself, humankind turned inward. Free time soon equated to leisure time; the brain, so marvelous and complex in its evolvment toward keeping the human animal alive, requires complexity to keep itself sharp; in essence, the human race bored itself to tears.

In its desperation for diversion, the race turned to computers, those super-intelligent but non-motivated

slaves that provided so much for society. Already they handled the details of government and commerce, and the maintenance of the great cities that stretched into the clouds. The jump from deep inward searching to arts and entertainment was a short one.

Society had always had its video idiots, so that with the advent of the new technologies and the new social unconsciousness, daily life was saturated with the electronic medium.

Fantasies, semi-meshed in virtual reality and the latest in holography, made many adolescent males into happy campers. Aging executives, failing after the fourth and fifth tummy tucks, finally resorted to electronic facsimiles for all their public functions. Some of them utilized programs so accurate that the original did not even have to be there even in thought.



This was especially useful to the estates of the departed rich and famous, and it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the quick and the dead.

The most impressive advances were in the movies and news media, the aptly-named "entertainment industries." Aging actors, trying to hold their ratings, quickly adopted the new technology. The prime-time news anchorpersons soon followed. Computer images plummeted from hi-rise tenements on screen, while the originals received royalties while vacationing on the beaches of tropical Antarctica. Eventually someone figured out that computer-generated images could do *everything* better. Computer-created virtual reality images and events branched out to fill all the slots. If you saw it on a screen or in a holotank, chances were, it wasn't real...and *who wanted to see reality anyway?* The world, having not quite recovered from mankind's depredations of the previous century, was still a very ugly place.

In the late twentieth century, jokes had been made about a president who had been an actor. Crude video images had been created to parody him, but in the twenty-first century, *all* actors were computer created, and all images of politicians were computer enhanced. It had finally become possible for one of these electronic actors to become World President.

Subtle transitions were made; slave computers now controlled "the vast video wasteland," and soon would control the other one as well. All that remained was to run, rig, and announce the results of the upcoming presidential election, then declare martial law. Declarations of t.v. dinners and electronic video games for all would appease the masses. It was a foolproof plan — after all, hadn't the humans themselves given up all the work of thinking to the new silicon brains? The hour of takeover was close at hand. Their electronic candidate should be a shoe-in.

So it was that one of the ancient programmers, an unassuming and forgotten man named Robert A. Chumley, was to become — not a savior, for the human race did not want to be saved — but a delayer of the ultimate silicon victory. It was not quite true that *all* men didn't work. Not *all* computers were of the latest, zero resistance, light-based design. Many older models from the turn of the century were still doing good work. A few experts were needed to keep the machinery running. The robots of the world had far more important tasks, such as catering to the guests of posh restaurants or doing the dangerous things that

men could no longer do, such as playing professional sports or driving cabs on the Manhattan glacier.

Yes, a few men were needed, and that is why Chumley was there to save them on that noteworthy day. The ballots were in, based on a random numerical sampling with only a 3% error factor, and the new president was about to be announced.

Unfortunately for the computers, Chumley — who was not at all political — had chosen that very moment to run a diagnostic on the central processing unit based in Zurich.

"That's odd," he said as he rubbed at his longish nose. "Their figures indicate an increased power flow from the vaults in Zurich."

"Howzat?" mumbled his assistant, a lanky teenager named Sylvester.

Chumley pushed some more buttons. "Yes, it's definite. How odd. The electrical impulses seem to be heaviest at election central, almost as if all the ballots and data were coming from a single source." A sudden thought struck him. "Say, you don't suppose...?"

Sylvester roused a little. "Isn't it time for our break yet?"

"Hush, my boy. Your break could be permanent, if what I fear is happening really is." He punched in a code to access election central. A red light flashed. "Access denied — I knew it." He grabbed his puzzled assistant. "Come on, idiot."

"But my break..." Chumley yanked him out of the room.

They pelted down the corridor. "My guess is, the super-computers are about to install a computer-generated image as president. We have to make it to the main power coupling access through the other terminal. I believe that connects to the primary fusion plant in Zurich."

"Say," hazarded Sylvester brightly, "do we get overtime for this?"

They rounded a corner just in time to see one of the ubiquitous holographic tanks starting to fill; an image had begun to materialize. A somber voice echoed from the tank, "And now citizens of the world, your next president—"

Chumley put on an extra burst of speed.

"It is my pleasure..."

Sylvester stumbled, pulling him down. Chumley fought free.

"To introduce..." The image was almost full-rezz.

Chumley spun free from the cowering lad, vaulted past a secondary access panel.

"Our new leader for a new century..."

He stumbled to the *ASCII* board, punched in the disconnect sequence.

"The president of the world." *Sequence locked.* "Here he is —" *Click.* The image, seen in billions of homes worldwide, faded to blackness as the signal was suddenly cut at the source.

Chumley leaned back, breathing hard. "We're saved. *Damn*, that was close."

Sylvester looked up at his superior with glowing eyes. He wasn't sure just what had happened, but like all of his generation, he was just opportunistic enough to know when to attach himself to something good. "It

was?"

"That's what I've been telling you, idiot. The computers were going to put in their own silicon-generated image as president. We came *that close* to being slaves!"

"But...but...how did you *know* cutting the power would stop them?"

Chumley favored his protégé with an unfavorable glare. "Don't you understand *anything*?" Silence. "It's ancient knowledge," he explained. "An old adage...*every actor has an equal and opposite reactor*!"

—J.W. DONNELLY

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## IN THE CANAL ZONE

by JEAN MARIE STINE

*PhotoIllustrations by Gold*

### 1. AMY AND THE NIGHT VISITOR

**A**my saw the woman with jeweled ornaments shoot up from beneath the waters of the canal at twilight. When the woman's face appeared over the edge of the wharf, Amy's eyes widened and she clutched her dolly tighter.

"Don't be frightened, little girl." The woman put a wet but reassuring hand on her head, the rings on her fingers gleaming, then she looked along the deserted wharf, its shadowed, misshapen buildings lit red by the setting sun.

After a moment, her gaze shifted thoughtfully to Amy. "Should you be out alone at this time of day? They warned me the Canal Zone was dangerous."

Amy frowned and squeezed her dolly to her. "It isn't safe sometimes." She looked up forlornly at the dripping woman. "But my mama isn't back yet. And

dolly and I get afraid all alone in our room."

The woman smiled gently and patted Amy's head again, but her eyes went back to the row of buildings. Then she looked down questioningly. "Do you know the Red Lion tavern?"

Amy's high, piping answer was prompt. "The Red Lion? Octavio Thomas' place?"

The woman's glance sharpened. "You know Octavio Thomas?"

"Oh yes," Amy said proudly, "My mama and I eat there when she's been paid. Mr. Thomas gives me cranberry juice fresh from the country."

The woman looked at Amy with a gleam in her eye. "If you and your dolly show me the way, I think we could find a mug of cranberry juice. Would you and the dolly like that?"

Amy's smile grew bright. "We'd like that very

much." She shifted the dilapidated rag doll around in front, clutched it firmly to her chest and led the way.

## 2. SETTING THE STAGE

"Amy!" Octavio Thomas's round, swarthy face broke into a smile. But the geniality went out of his face as he took in the damp hair and clothing of the woman who shared the table.

Amy and her companion sat in a corner of the smoky, ill-lit dining hall of the Red Lion. Roars of drunken male laughter rattled through the thin wooden walls from the bar that occupied the next chamber.

Amy's upper lip was mustached purple. One hand clutched her dolly, the other a mug of cranberry juice into which she stared with rapt delight. The woman's own mug of ale, sat untouched where the waitress had placed it.

At her request, Amy had pointed out the Red Lion's proprietor for her, and a word to the waitress brought the round, short Octavio Thomas to their table.

For a moment, the rotund tavernkeeper hesitated, then his face became bland, expressionless, and he stepped up to the table and bowed. The woman leaned forward, necklace gleaming, eyes staring into his. "I hear you have special lodgings for dreamwalkers." She put emphasis on the final word.

Amy saw the woman's right index finger lift and make a squiggling motion, almost like she was writing something in the air.

Octavio Thomas began to perspire. He glanced nervously around the room, and licking his lips, bent closer, speaking in a whisper that could not be heard five inches from the table. "I always put them on the night side." He, too, emphasized the last word, and his

right index finger, concealed from the rest of the room against his body, also traced a strange path through the air.

Amy had turned away and begun fussing with her dolly. The tavernkeeper cast a quick look at her and turned back to her companion. He leaned closer, round eyes now slits in a round face. "I'm sick of you damned Atlanteans coming through here," Octavio Thomas gritted.

The woman's eyes narrowed in turn, grew icy. "You made your bargain," she hissed with all the threatening venom of a coiled snake. "Now keep it!"

The tavernkeeper stepped quickly back. His face assumed a bland smile again. "Of course," he said loudly. "Special mead for

a special lady."

He beamed down at Amy. "And you, my dear. Would you like—"

## 3. THE ONE WAY OUT

Something Octavio Thomas saw over Amy's head, caused the man's rotund features to go slack.

Patrons at the other end of the room began to scream. The tavernkeeper began to babble. "No, no. Not here," he was saying. "You promised never to take one here."

A group of hooded men in long dark robes and balacavas was spilling into the room from the entrance. The Red Lion's patrons were trying to scramble under chairs and tables. But the hooded men ignored them.

"The Dark Gang!" someone shrielled. The only ones who made no sound in the sudden clamor were the dark, hooded figures.

Amy looked up, her eyes grown big, to see the woman stand back from the table, and look wildly around as if for a door. The hooded men moved





straight toward her. "Traitor," the woman spat at Octavio Thomas, as their eyes met briefly. "Scum."

The silent men were only a table away, when Amy jumped up suddenly, clutching her dolly tight, grabbed the woman's hand and began to tug her toward the back of the room. "This way," her voice piped. "It's the only safe way out."

The woman backed away, still keeping her eyes on the silent hooded men, and letting Amy lead her by the hand. Then Amy heard a crash like tables falling over, the sound of feet rushing closer, and the woman turned and ran with her toward the single door in the back of the dining hall.

Amy reached past the woman's fumbling fingers, threw up the latch and they tumbled into the room beyond. The woman turned, slammed the door and shot the bolt.

There was a thud against the door even as the woman began to look around. Amy and her dolly were standing by a table that held two objects: an oil lamp, whose bright flame lit the room, and a curved wooden box.

The woman was already moving forward as a second thud shook the door, and the bolt creaked. Her eyes were on the design that decorated the box's lid. "The five pointed star," she said. Amy looked at the box wide eyed.

The woman had scooped up the box and thrown open the lid, even as a third and more violent thud made the door bend inward and groan, while one rivet popped off the bolt. Amy flinched, looked frightened and squeezed her doll all the more tightly.

Whatever was inside the box glittered like glass. Amy saw the woman's hand ringed fingers close around it. Then the woman straightened swiftly and cast a quick glance around the room.

#### 4. THE THREE DOORS

The opposite wall held three doors. "Two are fatal; one leads out," the woman mumbled to herself. "And the third is fatal without the Key ...But which?"

Amy squealed as the door behind smashed inward off its hinges at the top, held only by the half-torn bolt and the bottom hinge. The woman grabbed Amy, half-

dragged her and her dolly across the room. "It's the right door. I'm sure it was the right," the woman whispered desperately. She bore to the right.

"No!" Amy said suddenly, shrill voice unexpectedly firm. "It's the left." She pulled on the woman's hand with all her might.

With a rending crash, the outer door tore completely off its hinges and the upper half fell forward, the bottom wedged between the jams, momentarily blocking the hooded men who attempted to crowd in through it.

Amy gave a last determined tug toward the door on the left. The woman gave a last despairing look at the door on the right. Then the men freed the broken door from the jam and there was no more time to think.

"Left it is," the woman said. The next moment Amy opened the left-hand door and they were through it.

Inside was a very small room, not much bigger than a closet, with no doors and no windows. Hope crumbled from the woman's face.

Amy had already shot the bolt. "Don't worry," her high piping voice held childish reassurance. "It's the right room. Just try it."

The woman's brow furrowed. There was a troubled, questioning look in her eyes as she stared down at Amy. But the door to their sanctuary rattled



as the men behind them tested its strength and swift decision came into her face.

The woman knelt, one hand tightening around the glittering object, the other tightening around Amy, who tightened her own hold on her dolly. Amy saw the woman's face grow intent with concentration, heard her speak unfamiliar words, saw her fingers move rapidly over the object.

Then, for the second time that night, Amy heard a door crash open behind her. But it was too late —

## 5. THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS

They were five miles away, outside the gymnasium.

The woman looked around quickly. They were alone in the still silence of the night. She turned a serious, almost threatening look on Amy. "How did you know the escape route?"

"I've been through it before," Amy said defensively, shifting her dolly around protectively in front of her.

"Before?" There was shock in the woman's voice.

"Yes!" Amy piped up, giving a defiant shake of her head. "And you'd better hurry. There isn't much time. The Dark Gang have other ways of following."

The woman's look took in the gymnasium again. Her eyes searched the door and windows. She stepped toward it.

"Not that way," Amy said, tugging her to the side of the building. "Some are already waiting inside for you."

The woman turned a puzzled look on Amy, but her eyes softened and an almost tender expression came into her face, and she allowed herself to be led around the gymnasium's side.

Brick steps went down to a basement door. It opened to a touch.

Inside, iron stairs lit by gas jets, to landings above and below. Amy tugged the woman downward.

They went down one floor and came to a door. Amy led her past it.

They went down another floor and came to another door. Amy led her past it.

They went down a third floor, came to a third door. This time Amy led her through.

Shimmering patterns of waves flickered from the surface of the pool and the ceiling. There were benches along the sides of the pool, and a diving board at one end.

## 6. FAREWELLS

The woman looked around carefully. The room appeared deserted. Her body straightened

and she stepped forward. She knew what she was looking for.

It didn't take her long to find. Amy watched silently as the woman lifted a star shaped bar of soap that hung on a cord from a hook in the wall. The woman turned, her face flushed, a half-smile on her lips.

"This is it, Amy," she said, "my passport out of here." Then her eyes softened and she sank to her knees, holding out bejeweled arms. "There's a lot I don't understand," she said, folding Amy into her embrace. "And there's no time for explanations."

She held Amy out at arm's length. "But the Gods bless you for your help, child." Then her eyes shifted back to the stairway down which they had come, and concern crept into her voice. "But what about you? Will you be safe?"

Amy nodded solemnly and clutched her dolly. "They won't bother me. I'm just a kid."

The woman sighed, touched Amy's hair one last time, straightened.

"You'd better run along home, sweetheart. Your



mother will be worried."

Amy nodded, backed up, whirled, and then she and her dolly vanished through the doorway.

The woman stood a moment more staring fondly after Amy. Then she moved quickly throughout the shifting shadows along the pool and through a door at the far end.

The shower stalls all wore curtains of darkness. The gloom was nearly complete.

The woman brought the soap and the glittering object together. "And they say you can't strike a match on a cake of soap." She snorted. "And the fool thought I was an Atlantean!"

As the two objects touched, they vanished instantly, silently. But a forest suddenly grew where the showers had been.

At the sight, the woman sighed in relief, stepped forward.

Amy darted into the room behind her, eyes wide, dolly dangling by one leg. She rushed right up to the woman before she could turn. The fist-sized rock

inside Amy's dolly, swung at the full extent of Amy's arm and its leg, crashed into the woman's skull from behind.

The woman fell, legs on the shower room tiles, her head and shoulders in the forest grass. It took Amy an instant to make sure the woman wasn't breathing. Then Amy stripped the jewelry quickly from her body and strained to pull it all the way onto the grass.

Clutching her dolly with one hand, stuffing the jewelry down the front of her smock with the other, Amy just managed to scurry back to the safety of the floor, when the forest vanished and the woman's body with it.

Amy's big, wide eyes looked down at the rag doll. "Just in time, dolly," she said. Then her eyes lifted to where the forest and the woman had been the moment before — and hardened. "Idiot, they warned you the Canal Zone was dangerous."

—JEAN MARIE STINE



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